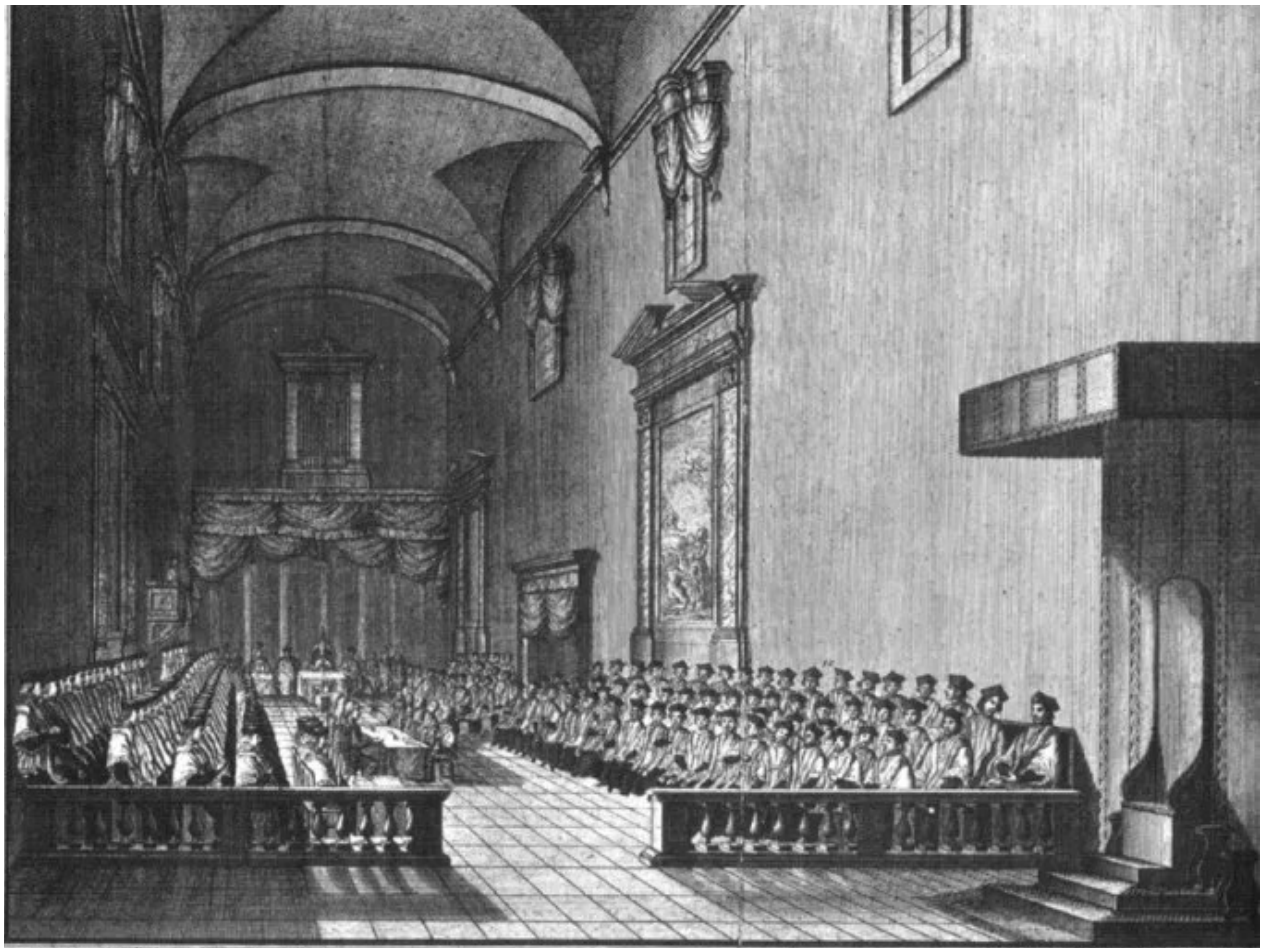
Synod of Pistoia

1786

The Decrees from the Synod of Pistoia and the Circular letter from Leopold II, Grand Duke of Tuscany used in the Synod

From Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (*Florence, 1788 edition)*

Translated with Claude AI Sonnet 5



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Session II — 26 January 1786

The Grand Duke's Circular Letter and the Fifty-Seven Articles — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session II, pages 46–70. This is not a decree of the Synod itself but the reform agenda that occasioned it: on 26 January 1786, Grand Duke Peter Leopold of Tuscany sent an identical circular letter and list of fifty-seven articles to every bishop in Tuscany, asking each to submit it to his own diocesan synod for debate, amendment, and response. Bishop Ricci read this letter and these articles to the assembled Fathers in Session II; the articles range from synodal procedure and clerical formation to liturgical practice, the regulation of religious orders, and a substantial reading list for parish priests. Many of the Synod's later decrees (on Prayer, on Holy Orders, on the reform of the Breviary and Missal) directly implement proposals first raised here.*

The Grand Duke's Cover Letter

Written by order of His Royal Highness the Archduke Grand Duke of Tuscany to the Bishops his subjects.

Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Lord and Esteemed Patron.

His Royal Highness regards it as his first and principal duty to see that the exercise of our holy Religion be purged of every abuse and prejudice, and of everything that hinders its being brought back to its true and rightful perfection, simplicity, and splendor. And, holding especially dear the most important and precise obligation resting on him to see that the People be well instructed in the duties of that same Religion according to its true principles, and that the Ministers of the Church and the Clergy make themselves ever more respectable and useful to the Public in their holy and important ministry (which cannot be achieved except through exemplary conduct, doctrine, prudence, and instruction), he has for a long time and with mature consideration reflected on these matters, setting down various points of view and maxims on the things that seemed to him necessary in order to achieve, little by little, this so greatly desired aim, and to bring Ecclesiastical matters into conformity, as far as possible, with the sacred Canons and with the ancient discipline of the Church — so venerable and respectable a discipline, from which, in later times, there has, alas, been a departure through the various abuses introduced, whether from ambition, self-interest, or other secondary political ends, to the spiritual harm of the Church herself.

However much this great and pressing matter has for a very long time always lain close to the heart of His Royal Highness, and been ever present to his eyes, and been the object of his

wishes and concerns, he has nevertheless always been held back from taking it in hand by his many other occupations, which distracted him, and by the fear that, in affairs of such importance, His Royal Highness, however good his intention, might issue some order or provision in these Ecclesiastical matters that could in some respect be contrary to the Laws and the spirit of the Church, and that could be maliciously misinterpreted by ill-intentioned persons pursuing their own interests, so as to scandalize the public and the ignorant unnecessarily, and thereby produce a greater evil than the good he intended to procure.

Given all these considerations, then, he has not wished to issue further orders in these matters without first being assured of the usefulness of these proposed determinations of his for the spiritual good and edification of the people, and of their conformity with the Canons and Ecclesiastical Discipline. And since it matters a great deal that, in affairs of this importance — and especially in all that concerns Ecclesiastical matters — the books to be prescribed for the instruction of the people, and the rules to be prescribed for the studies of the Clergy, be uniform throughout the State and in all the Dioceses, His Royal Highness has resolved to communicate these views of his on Ecclesiastical matters, as he does with this Letter, in a circular sent to all the Bishops of Tuscany, so that they, through their zeal, their concern for the true good of Religion, for the good order and discipline of the Church, and their attachment to sound doctrine in these matters, might, with their wise opinions and counsel, facilitate the execution of these views of his.

To this end, His Royal Highness has resolved to consult conclusively with all the Bishops of Tuscany, to whom he has, on this same day, likewise sent these same points for the same purpose, having resolved to pass these points on afterward for discussion and resolution to the Synods of their respective Dioceses.

These points contain those matters which His Royal Highness has in view on these subjects, noted down simply as they occurred to his mind, in the manner of an outline; he being well persuaded that, once communicated to his learned and enlightened Bishops, these points need neither further clarification nor citations or authorities to prove the conformity of many of them with the teaching of the Holy Fathers, with the maxims of the Church, the sacred Canons, and the Decrees of the Council of Trent.

His Royal Highness wishes that Your Lordship give them consideration with all due maturity, and at your own convenience, and, within the term of six months, up to the coming 31st of July, send them back to him directly, stating your own view on each point with the greatest freedom, trust, and confidence, having in view solely the good of the Church, the spiritual benefit of the peoples entrusted to you, and the restoration of discipline and sound doctrine, setting aside every other consideration; and to this end you will forward them, jointly and directly, to the address of His Royal Highness, adding to them any further reflections and information you believe would be advantageous.

In giving your opinion, His Royal Highness will be pleased for Your Lordship to state freely which of these propositions you believe cannot be carried out and ought to be rejected, and

which you would judge imprudent to carry out, and, in short, to add anything you consider could be added to achieve this aim, along with such observations and additions as you judge fitting.

I remain, with the most distinguished respect, Your Lordship's Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Most devoted and obliged servant, VINCENZO DEGLI ALBERTI. Florence, 26 January 1786. [Addressed to] Monsignor the Bishop of Pistoia and Prato.

The Fifty-Seven Articles

I. The convocation of Diocesan Synods being necessary for the good of the Church, so that Bishops, informed by their Parish priests and by the most upright Ecclesiastics of the abuses that may have crept into their Flock, may, together with their Clergy, remedy them effectively and in good time, His Royal Highness therefore wishes that all the Bishops of his State convene their Synod at least every two years, beginning in the summer of 1786, hoping they will take it as a point of honor — without simply taking earlier Synods as their sole model — to bring themselves, together with their Parish priests, into conformity with sound Doctrine and with the Laws of the State.

II. Parish priests, both of the City and of the Countryside, are the Ecclesiastics with the greatest right to attend, in preference to Canons and other Beneficed clergy and Ecclesiastics of the Diocese. Nevertheless, since the attendance of all Parish priests, especially those from the Countryside, could create a gap in the spiritual service of the people, and could be a hardship for many of them, and since, in some Dioceses, too great a number of proposers and voters could make deliberations more difficult and slower, all Parish priests should be summoned to the Synod, and, after the matters have been examined in each Deanery or Vicariate, the Parish priests of each respective Deanery should be free to choose a man of integrity and learning who, as their deputy, would attend the Synod bearing the mandate of each of those absent.

IV. He likewise wishes that each of the Bishops put forward his own proposals for fixing the matters he believes fall within the competence of the Diocesan Synods to be treated and decided, it being found necessary to correct the public prayers where they contain things contrary to the Doctrine of the Church. It shall be one of the Synods' principal tasks to attend to the reform of the Breviaries and Missals, removing false and erroneous legends, and seeing to it that, within the year, the whole of Scripture is read, the cost of the new Breviaries and Missals being borne by the Ecclesiastical Patrimony.

The Synods shall examine, and propose a method for restricting, the abuse of frequent oaths taken uselessly, without due circumspection, and as a mere formality.

They shall examine whether it would be useful to administer the Sacraments in the vernacular tongue, so as to bring even those ignorant of Latin into the spirit of the Church's Prayers.

They shall examine, in the Synods, whether it is fitting to abolish all Cures given by popular election [*Cure di data di Popolo*], so as to prevent the frequent acts of simony that occur in connection with them.

V. And believing one of the important objects to be the restoring to the Bishops' authority the original rights of which they have been abusively deprived by the Court of Rome, they may examine which of the Dispensations reserved by the Court of Rome can be regarded as a usurpation of the Bishops' legitimate jurisdiction, and reclaimed by them — among these particularly the following:

The dispensation granted to Ordinands from defects of birth and bodily defects: it might be settled never to grant such a dispensation, nor to accept a dispensation for intervals between Orders or for defects of birth, nor ever a dispensation of age in order to enjoy simple Benefices, even of one's own patronage.

The dispensation to change the Divine Office for other Prayers.

For saying a votive Mass.

For choosing the pro-synodal Examiners.

For the wearing of the Wig, which might better be abolished.

For transferring, reducing, curtailing, remitting, or commuting the obligations of Offices and Masses into other pious works, for any Benefice, Chapel, pious Office, or bequest.

The dispensation from, or commutation of, simple vows.

Permission for Girls and first-degree Relatives to enter Convents, and to admit Girls of any age, and Widows, to live there.

To extend the term of Abbesses and Superiors.

To permit Nuns to go to the Baths, or to their Relatives, for just reasons of health, or to transfer them from one Convent to another, and from Convents into Conservatories [secular boarding institutions].

The license to supply, by a supplementary oath, proof of free civil status [for marriage].

To secularize Regular clergy, upon prior provision from the Ecclesiastical Patrimony.

And all other kinds of dispensations that they believe they might propose.

VI. And as regards matrimonial dispensations, they might consider whether, by fixing certain degrees of cognate and agnate kinship for which a dispensation could never be granted under any circumstances, it might fall to the Bishop, for the other degrees, to grant it by his own authority, but free of charge. Whether it would be fitting to abolish entirely the impediment of spiritual kinship [between godparents and godchildren], and whatever might be fitting regarding the other impediments of public decency, status, error, etc.

VII. Since it matters a great deal that Ecclesiastics, both Secular and Regular, hold the same true principles of morals, and consequently the same course of studies and the same maxims, especially for use in the confessional, it would seem useful for a uniform method of Ecclesiastical studies to be prescribed, both in Seminaries, Ecclesiastical Academies, and Universities, and in the Convents of Regular clergy. It would be fitting for this uniform method to be proposed by the Bishops, and for the Authors on whom study should chiefly be based to be prescribed, holding it as a maxim that all ecclesiastical studies should be directed according to the doctrine of St. Augustine, and that whoever should not profess this Doctrine in all its parts should henceforth be incapable of hearing confessions or holding the care of souls, nor be admissible to competitive examinations for benefices.

VIII. With the sole aim of providing the Church with the ablest, most active, most zealous, and most moderate Ministers, they shall take into consideration what is most fitting regarding the titles for ordination.

Rectories, or Curate Chaplaincies alone, would be the most legitimate title for ordination, were it not for the danger of thereby promoting a person entirely new to the ministry of Parish priest and Confessor, whose vocation had not been sufficiently tested by actual practice.

The title of simple Benefices, when they yield a surplus sufficient for subsistence — and still more the title of one's own Patrimony — most often produces idle Priests who, already having their livelihood, take no care to render service to the Church, especially in Cures far from their home, or in inconvenient and difficult places.

The title of an "Ufiziatura" [an endowed chaplaincy tied to specific liturgical duties] — and still more the title introduced as a privilege for service to the Church — is certainly the least canonical, but gives the Church the most diligent Priests, the most tested in ecclesiastical exercises, and perhaps even the most learned, since men in the clerical state alone see no other means of subsistence but activity and learning.

The Bishops may take all these considerations into account, as well as the canonical Constitutions, experience, and the circumstances of their Diocese, and may examine and settle on the system most conducive to the good of the Church and to the spiritual service of the people, with no other aim or consideration; and, in order to keep in force the Canons of the Council of Chalcedon and of the Council of Trent, Session 23, Chapter 16 — they alone being answerable to God for the unworthy ministers they give to the Church, whatever system they establish — they should always reject from the Priesthood all those in whom, whatever title they hold, a true vocation, honesty of life, talent, and the learning needed to be useful in their ministry are not found.

And should a genuine, non-fictitious private Patrimony be admitted as a title for ordination, it must be of a free income, net of encumbrances, of at least sixty Scudi, since the Patrimony is required for ordination solely so that, in every case of illness or misfortune, one may have a livelihood, without relying on Mass income alone and thereby forcing a Priest into unbecoming occupations.

Consistent with this, it is indispensable that no one be admitted to the Tonsure or clerical dress before the age of 18, except those living in Seminaries, and unless they have first given sure proof of their honesty, good conduct, morals, good disposition, and vocation for the ecclesiastical career. As for those already invested with some Benefice, it would be well to ensure that they have, so far as their age allows, a vocation for ecclesiastical study, and that it is not mere inclination, or the parents' advantage, that leads them to have their son request the Tonsure. That no young man under eighteen may be attached to the service of Churches even in the capacity of minor cleric.

That the Bishops propose a way of removing this minor clergy of boys from the Cathedrals and Collegiate Churches, proposing another system to supply the service of the Churches. It would also be well to ensure good conduct and progress in studies appropriate to their age.

As for those who request the Tonsure without a Benefice, besides vocation and good conduct, it might be required that they have completed the studies of Rhetoric.

That, should the service of Cathedral or Parish Churches require the admission of Young men of an age at which they could not yet have completed the course of Rhetoric, the Bishops might permit them only to wear clerical dress, without having initiated them into that state through the Tonsure.

And at each transition from one Order to another, the same examinations on vocation, conduct, and studies should be renewed with full rigor.

IX. *[Note: this article, on age and vocational requirements for minor orders, appears to run continuously with Article VIII in the source text without a clear separating numeral in the scan; the numbering resumes clearly at Article X below.]*

X. For promotion to the Subdiaconate, it might be required that studies in the sacred sciences have been pursued with profit for at least three years. A four-year course of such studies might be required for the Diaconate, and for the Priesthood it should be required that the entire course of Theology has been completed, and further that Clerics may not be ordained unless they have been in the Bishops' Seminaries, or have served the Cathedral or a Parish Church. Rigorous examination, and reports from the respective Lecturers or Teachers, should ensure that such studies have been pursued with profit, with greater weight to be given to the reports of Lecturers or Teachers when they are Professors at Universities or Ecclesiastical Academies.

XI. Whenever, at any promotion prior to the Subdiaconate, the Bishops recognize in someone either a lack of disposition or little aptitude for studies, it would be desirable that, instead of merely postponing his ordination, they advise him, sincerely and with charity, to choose some other path in good time, rather than leaving him, out of compassion, in false hope, causing him to lose every other means of establishing himself, and, through his own insistence, being at last forced to ordain him despite his unfitness.

XII. The Priestly state carries duties so grave that the longest and most mature reflection is not excessive before embracing it. It follows that all dispensations from the age requirement

should be rejected, as should those from the intervals *between Orders — leaving the latter, however, to the Bishops' prudent judgment, according to what the Council of Trent provides*.

As for the other canonical impediments, the Bishops might examine which are of minor consequence, and might always, or in certain circumstances, be dispensed from, and which should never be dispensed from at all.

***XIII*.** For admission to competitive examinations for Cures, Curate Chaplaincies, Canonries, and Benefices, it might be required that candidates, for at least three years after ordination, have continued their studies in Moral Theology, either at a University, an Ecclesiastical Academy, or with an accredited Lecturer — of which they must produce Certificates — as well as having practiced in the Cure where they reside, whether in preaching, instruction, or the Confessional, having attended the sick and dying, and having taken part in case-conferences.

As for Cures and Curate Chaplaincies, these same requirements might be demanded of candidates presented by the respective Patrons, since the Patrons' right does not extend to giving the People a less capable minister, and the people's right to be well instructed and cared for takes precedence.

***XIV*.** The Bishops shall consider what is fitting regarding the increase of Mass stipends, for as long as necessity requires that their use be maintained, as well as the reduction of the obligations of Masses and Offices attached to Ufiziature and Benefices, having chief regard to the subsistence of that number of Ecclesiastics necessary for the service of the Diocese and for the convenience of the People.

And in reducing and transferring the obligations attached to Masses, it would be fitting that a sufficient number of these be transferred, from those Churches — especially in the City — where they are superfluous for the People's convenience, to rural Cures for the benefit of the Parish priest and Chaplains, so that on this account they should never have reason to be absent from their Cure.

***XV*.** It seems that, according to the spirit of the Church, no one should hold more than one Benefice, even a simple one, and absolutely no one should hold more than one residential Benefice. Regarding the latter, it may be fitting to establish as an absolute maxim that any derogation, or dispensation of any kind whatsoever, that anyone might obtain, be rejected.

As regards simple Benefices, those of private patronage might be exempted, it not being possible to make changes to them without prejudicing the rights of active or passive patronage held by private families, or the conditions formally established in their foundation, which amount to a kind of contract.

But as regards all simple Benefices of ordinary collation, or of Ecclesiastical, Royal, Communal, or pious-foundation patronage, it would be fitting, where their income is meager, to unite both their endowments and their obligations, so as to form enough of them that each would have a net income of at least sixty scudi.

To constitute them thus, the Ufiziature and Mass endowments might also be merged into them, and, thus reduced and endowed, they could be joined to the Cures most in need of assistance, making them all residential, with the obligation on the Beneficiary to render service to the Parish in the sacred functions, in the Confessional, and in attending the sick, as true Curate Chaplaincies — with the suggestion to the Bishops that they exactly observe the recent Circulars regarding Lay patronages.

XVI. For residential Benefices — Canonries and Chaplaincies of Cathedrals and Collegiate Churches not excluded — any substitution, and any dispensation to permit substitution, shall be forbidden, even in the case of incapacity through illness or advanced age; in such a case, the full income might still be owed to the Beneficiary, treating him as though present, without giving another person the right to succeed him in the Benefice through such substitution — a practice that seems repugnant to the ancient Ecclesiastical Constitutions.

XVII. The granting of simple Benefices — both those of ecclesiastical, Royal, communal, or pious-foundation patronage, to be converted into residential Benefices as under Article 15, and any that, for whatever reason, could not undergo such a change, as well as the granting of all simple Benefices of private patronage — might generally be restricted to Diocesans currently residing in the Diocese, and, for those not of private patronage, limited to those alone who render actual service in some Church of the Diocese, and to all Benefices conferred by competitive examination; and as regards Cures, even those of private patronage, besides the requirement of being a Diocesan, the standing orders requiring the status of subject [of the Grand Duchy] shall remain in force.

XVIII. With the system indicated in Article 15 regarding simple Benefices, since Clerics will for the most part lose their subsistence from such Benefices until they have reached the Priesthood and been provided for within it, it would be fitting for the Bishops, in proportion to the needs of their respective Dioceses, to expand the establishments of the Ecclesiastical Academies, proposing the means of doing so, and to increase the number of free places in them, so that the path should not be barred, for want of means, to those who, along with a true vocation, combine the talent and conduct needed to be useful to the Church.

And should such Academies become sufficiently extensive, they shall consider whether it would be fitting to prescribe that no one may compete for Curate Churches, even those of private patronage, unless he has pursued advanced studies in these Academies, and has there practiced for some time in parish ministries.

XIX. The Bishops may consider whether, in each Diocese, a retreat house for Priests could be established in a suppressed Convent, in which, so many at a time, all Parish priests and Chaplains would be obliged to make their spiritual exercises once a year.

XX. Whoever is ordained a Priest contracts, by that ordination, the precise obligation to serve the people and the Church in all ministries inherent to the Priesthood. And since it is not the sole duty of a simple Priest to celebrate Mass, but each of them is likewise precisely obliged to serve the Church and the Faithful through preaching, through administering the Sacraments

in aid of the Parish priests, or through attending the sick, it would be fitting to consider how to make all of them active according to their strength and capacity.

XXI. All Priests holding a residential Benefice should be incardinated to the Church where their Benefice is founded, and all simple Priests to the Parish Church where they reside, under the authority of the Parish priest of that Church, celebrating Mass there for the People's convenience, and, at the hour prescribed by the Parish priest, attending the sacred functions, hearing confessions if qualified to obtain the license, attending the sick when requested, and attending all parish functions — Mass and Vespers — in church dress; and the Parish priest shall report to the Bishop every six months on their conduct and the fulfillment of their duties.

XXII. The abuse of many private Oratories, both in Houses in the Countryside and in the City — most of them unbecoming, and which turn families away from attending their Cure without any just reason — seems to deserve a remedy.

XXIII. Private Oratories and Chapels in Houses, especially in the City, should all be abolished, notwithstanding any brief, privilege, or license, without any distinction whatsoever, since they exist only in Cities and in the Houses of persons who have every convenience to go to Church at any time and in any season; and, besides being unbecoming, they serve only to keep their families and servants from attending Parish functions.

Of non-Curate rural Churches and Oratories, only those might be left standing which are at some distance from the Cure, and which are of use to the Parish by becoming daughter-churches dependent on the Parish priest. And the Oratories of country Villas shall be regarded as private Oratories, with the exception of those which, owing to the Villa's distance, are of use to the people; in the others, useful only to the owners and residents of the Villas, it shall only be permitted to say Mass there while the owners are in residence, on condition that no [other] functions ever be held there, and that they remain dependent on the Parish priest for whatever functions are to be celebrated there, as well as for the propriety of these and of the sacred furnishings; and it should be prescribed that, on the more solemn feast days, they must certainly be kept closed.

XXIV. For Priests from foreign States not employed in the service of any Church of the Diocese, it would be expedient for the Bishops, having taken due precautions, not to grant the celebret [permission to celebrate Mass] except for a few days; or, should it be established that they need to stay longer, the celebret should be limited to a single Church, assigning them a fixed hour and making them dependent on the Parish priest, until they are better tested and known.

XXV. The ancient Canons of the Church concerning the honesty of Ecclesiastics' lives deserve to be called back into the most perfect observance, and, in keeping with them, Ecclesiastics should be obliged to wear clerical dress constantly, and always to wear the long garment in the City, and to abstain from attending all secular spectacles — theaters and balls — as well as cafés, public gaming-houses and billiard halls, from attending markets, from hunting and gambling; they should be forbidden to act as agents, stewards, rent-collectors, solicitors, or

engage in other secular occupations, or to hold positions in financial administration that would bind them to render accounts, nor in other pursuits unbecoming to their character; besides purely ecclesiastical duties, they should be permitted only the instruction of youth, and employment in instruction bearing on public piety.

XXVI. There being but one Bishop in the Diocese, and the Canons being nothing other than that portion of the Clergy who lived with him to serve as his council, assistance, and service in the sacred functions, it would seem fitting not only that there be but a single Cathedral in each Diocese, but also that all other Collegiate Churches, their Dignities and Canonries, be suppressed, and that in their place the Parish priest be established under the sole title of Parish priest — a title of divine Institution, and far more respectable than all the titles later invented to feed individuals' vanity — together with such a number of Priests as the service of the Church and of the People required, under the sole title of Chaplains or Coadjutors; and Canonries shall be converted into as many Curate Chaplaincies for the People's benefit, likewise reforming the excessively numerous Canonries and Clergy of the Cathedrals and Collegiate Churches.

XXVII. It would be fitting for the Bishops to prescribe a set of regulations for Feasts, and for the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in Churches, Forty Hours' devotions, Novenas, etc., uniform across all Cures, preserving decorum and excluding luxury: those Feasts, Novenas, and Expositions alone should be fixed as permitted which follow the more ancient pious custom; Feasts in honor of Saints should be forbidden on Sundays and solemn Feasts. Excessive decoration, a needless quantity of lights, and music, whether vocal or instrumental, apart from choral chant and the organ, might be forbidden; and the Government will consider abolishing the profane festivities held around Churches on the occasion of sacred Feasts. It should be prescribed that all sacred functions and Expositions in Churches must be concluded during the day, before midnight; that women in indecent dress not be admitted to Church, that they remain separated from the men, charging the servants and sacristans of the Confraternities to see to this. That, likewise, no poor person go begging inside Churches, but that only the parish's Almoners [Buonomini] receive alms for the poor at the door. That only a single Mass be celebrated at a time, and that Masses be distributed at fixed hours for the greater convenience of the People. That, especially during the time of the Parish Mass and the explanation of the Gospel, no other Mass be celebrated in the same Church, and that the Parish priest fix the hours at which the Priests dependent on him are to celebrate Mass in his Church.

XXVIII. It would be fitting for the Bishops to take care to review all the Relics of the Churches of their Dioceses, removing all those whose authenticity was, on any grounds, doubtful, and not permitting their exposition even in the Churches of Regular clergy or of Nuns. They should also inspect the paintings and Images in the Churches, so as to remove those that are indecent or duplicated, and prescribe that all those which have hitherto been wrongly supposed to inspire greater veneration by being kept covered remain permanently

uncovered. And on the high Altar of the Church, where the Blessed Sacrament is to be reserved, every painting of Saints should be removed, leaving only a Cross.

It seems fitting that the Relics held in greatest veneration be placed beneath the Table of their respective Altars, and that all Images or Relics presently in the custody of Magistracies be handed over to the respective Bishops.

XXIX. Regarding suffrages for the Dead and the effects of the Communion of Saints, it would be fitting for the People to be better instructed and led to the more useful and reasonable practices. It would accordingly be fitting to consider whether it would be well for every Curate Church, and every Church of Regular clergy, to celebrate solemnly, once a month, the Office and Requiem Mass for all the Dead, and for all private Funeral rites and Anniversary Masses to be forbidden — while leaving each person free to have celebrated whatever number of ordinary [low] Masses he wishes.

XXX. As the Government continues to take every care that Parish priests be sufficiently provided for through allocations to be made from the Ecclesiastical Patrimonies, as well as by the respective patrons, it would be fitting for the Bishops, for their part, to further this important aim by whatever means are within their power, so that Parish priests be provided with a sufficient number of Chaplains in the service of the People; and, all being provided for so as to be able to live, that they no longer be under the necessity of having recourse to their parishioners, or of introducing or continuing small feasts, devotions, and offices, nor of degrading their ministry in any other way; and, as far as can be reconciled with the state of the current parish endowments, or with whatever increase to them may be made with the funds available or obtainable, they should see to the fairest and most convenient distribution of the population among each Cure.

XXXI. When the Bishops are persuaded that goods consecrated to Divine Worship are principally owed to those who, by the duty of their own ministry, must instruct the people in Religion and administer the Sacraments to them, they will more readily find, within their Dioceses, the means by which to relieve the needs of the Parish priests, and to have these be, as much as can humanly be hoped, capable and suited to so important an office.

XXXII. In a Parish priest, besides holiness of conduct and sound doctrine, there is need of the greatest prudence, knowledge, and experience of the world and of men, and of disinterestedness, and a true spirit of charity and love of neighbor. To be useful, the Parish priest must know how to make himself respected, esteemed, and loved, keeping far from all intrigues, favoritism, and — especially — gossip among his parishioners; he must apply himself to studying and knowing his people thoroughly; and, although he should, as far as possible, avoid meddling in the domestic affairs of his people's families when not specifically asked, he must nonetheless be ready, at any moment, to intervene to settle any disputes that may arise, as soon as he is called upon to do so.

A good Parish priest forestalls, among his people, a great many crimes, disorders, and improprieties, which, if not forestalled in time, produce greater ones that can no longer be remedied.

XXXIII. Being averse to any dealing or view to personal gain, he must have in view solely the instruction of his people, abstaining from leaving it to go to other feasts, country villas, etc., especially on feast days. He must have especially at heart the instruction of his people in true and solid morality, particularly among the young and children; must foster union and peace within families among relatives; must forestall all animosity and division through his admonitions; must strive to enlighten the people concerning true devotion, ridding them of any superstitious devotions they might have; must not admit to the Sacraments anyone insufficiently instructed, nor bless marriages unless certain that the contracting parties are sufficiently and properly instructed in the duties of Religion and of the state they are entering; and must be most exact in attending the sick and the dying.

XXXIV. Parish priests shall hold regular meetings for resolving Cases of Moral Theology, and shall transmit them at the times prescribed to them by the Bishops. It would be fitting for these meetings, besides the Parish priests and Curate Chaplains, to be attended by all the Priests of the Cures and of the Deanery, and for the approved resolutions of these Cases to be printed each year.

XXXV. It would be fitting to renew the orders forbidding Parish priests from being absent from their Cure, especially in the countryside on Feasts of obligation, admitting no excuse for this, least of all that of attending the feasts, "return visits," funeral rites, and offices held at other Churches.

XXXVI. While the Government is disposed to restore to the Cures the Goods that were taken from them for the sake of Abbeys, Canonries, and Benefices founded upon them, it would welcome the Bishops seconding this policy on their part, either by suppressing, or by making serve the better support and assistance of the Cures, the Canonries and Benefices under their own collation.

And, once the Parish priests are sufficiently provided for, it would be fitting to forbid them the collection of tithes, which makes them odious, and the collection of all stole-fees and every other uncertain church income, by which their ministry is degraded.

XXXVII. It would be desirable for the Bishops to take care for the propriety of Churches and sacred functions, while at the same time removing from them all that superfluous pomp which makes them neither more respectable nor more devout. Accordingly, in all rural Cures it might be fitting to leave only a single Altar, with nothing but the Crucifix upon it, and, at most, the painting of the titular Saint, and perhaps a painting of the Blessed Virgin — thereby removing the abuse of ordinarily keeping covered the Images of the Crucifix, of the Blessed Virgin, or of some other Saint, which inspires nothing but superstition.

It would likewise be fitting for all votive tablets and offerings for graces and miracles to be removed from Churches.

It would also be fitting for all indecent paintings and pictures to be removed from them.

The Bishops should also, for the honor of the Churches and of Religion, be committed to the observance of the orders forbidding every kind of begging inside Churches, whether during a sermon or an Exposition or on any other pretext, with the exception of that done at the door for the benefit of the poor. On the occasion of the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Forty Hours' devotions, and the Exposition of the Holy Sepulchre, it might be prescribed that there be no more than twenty-four lights, nor fewer than sixteen; and that for any other Feast the number of twelve lights not be exceeded — removing, in every case, all pomp of decoration, music, the distribution of printed sonnets, the firing of salutes, etc.

XXXVIII. The Bishops should prescribe which Feasts, Expositions of the Blessed Sacrament, and Novenas alone are to be celebrated in each Church, and it would be useful that, whenever the Exposition is held and the blessing with the Blessed Sacrament given, this be preceded by a brief moral address to the people.

No feast or novena should ever prevent the usual Parish functions, the Catechism, and the explanation of the Gospel on days of full obligation. It would be fitting for the Bishops to reduce, to as small a number as possible, novenas and extraordinary feasts not established by the ancient custom of the Church, especially those for newly canonized Saints, on account of which the people easily drift away from the more respectable practices and the more solid worship our Religion demands.

To preserve this worship, it would be fitting for the Bishops to take the trouble of also examining all the Relics exposed for veneration in each Church, and to remove those lacking a sufficient and reasonable authentication.

Except for the Processions of Corpus Christi and of the Rogations, established by a respectable custom, held outside the Church, and those of Palm Sunday, of the Holy Sepulchre, and of the Purification, held inside the Church, it seems that all the others could be abolished. And it is absolutely fitting to abolish those held to visit some image of the Madonna or other Image, which lead to nothing but indecent banquets and gatherings.

XXXIX. The sacred functions to be performed in the respective Cures are those most deserving of attention, as most useful for leading the People to a true and enlightened devotion. And the sanctification of feast days — a matter too much neglected in the past — should, it would be fitting, be established on a footing of better observance.

To this end it would be fitting to establish that, in every Parish, whether of the City or of the Countryside, at an hour convenient for the People, the Parish priest should, on feast days, carry out the Parish functions in the form set out below, and, in Cures where there is a Curate Chaplain, both the Parish priest and the Chaplain should carry them out at different hours for the People's convenience.

XL. No one may hear confessions in Curate Churches without the approval of the Bishop and of the Parish priest, who is answerable for whoever hears confessions among his People.

XLI. Before Mass, the Parish priest or Chaplain shall give the People a brief address on the sacrifice of the Mass, on how to attend it and hear it fruitfully, on uniting oneself with the Priest in the spirit of the Church, on its infinite merit, and on its application to the needs of the Church and of the People, for the living, and in suffrage for the Dead; and on particular feast days they may give them a brief Explanation of the Mystery the Church celebrates.

XLII. He shall recite, in the vernacular tongue, together with the people, the acts of faith, hope, charity, and contrition, along with any other prayer the Bishops may prescribe for public occasions.

XLIII. Mass shall then begin. It would be well for it to be said slowly, and in a loud, intelligible voice, and the Bishops might state whether it would be fitting for that portion of the people who, understanding Latin, grasp its meaning, to respond aloud as well.

XLIV. After the Gospel has been read, the Parish priest or Chaplain, turning to the people, shall read it in the vernacular, and shall then give its explanation and an address, drawing from it the teachings and moral maxims useful to the people. He shall take care that such addresses be brief, easily understood, and instructive, and contain a practical morality for the people, without losing themselves in mystical senses or dogmatic questions.

XLV. As the Mass continues, he shall, after his own communion, give communion to all those of the people who present themselves, preceded by a brief exhortation.

XLVI. When Mass is over, he shall recite with the people some prayer in the vernacular for the living and the dead, for the sick, and for the needs of the people and of the countryside, and shall conclude the service with the Te Deum. The Chaplain shall follow the same method at his own Mass.

XLVII. Catechism shall be held in the afternoon, when it has not already been held late in the morning, after the last Parish Mass has ended, and after the administration of the Sacraments in Church has concluded.

XLVIII. The short Catechism for children shall be held separately, outside the Church, wherever a suitable place may be found, and, where there is a Chaplain able to attend to this, while the Parish priest gives it in Church to the adults, or vice versa.

XLIX. The Catechism for adults must last at least half an hour; it should explain all the duties of Religion, and the maxims necessary for salvation — the Commandments of God and of the Church, the Apostles' Creed and its articles, the Lord's Prayer, the power of the Sacraments, and the disposition and preparation needed for them. They might read, in the vernacular, some chapter of Holy Scripture, with a brief explanation of it where necessary. Afterward Vespers shall be recited, and then either the blessing of the Blessed Sacrament shall be given, or the "Good Death" devotion held, according to the different seasons and circumstances.

L. Whenever, on days of obligation, all these works of Religion are carried out in the Parishes, the Bishops will have all the more reason not to permit any other minor feasts for Saints, expositions of Relics, and minor devotions in the Churches. The Sermons of Advent and Lent might likewise be abolished, with the exception of one or two in the principal Churches of the City, on condition that these be in the manner of Catechism and no other; and they might absolutely forbid all Panegyrics for the Saints, which amount to nothing but vain oratorical display, without any fruit.

LI. On Sundays, apart from those commemorations the Church permits in the Divine Offices, it would seem fitting that any feast for particular Saints be forbidden in every Church.

LII. It would be fitting for Parish priests to be diligent about the education and instruction of the Youth of their People, devoting themselves to it in every way and at every time permitted to them.

LIII. Being zealous to enlighten the People about true devotion, he shall strive to turn them away from useless or superstitious devotions, to instruct them on the value of Indulgences and the dispositions needed to gain them, on how to offer suffrage for the Dead not only through Masses but through all the other works of piety, on the application of Masses, on the Communion of Saints, and on other similar articles — either wholly unknown to the people, or handed down by them with countless errors attached.

LIV. To put even the less learned Parish priests in a position to carry out their ministry well, it might be useful to translate and print the books that could best serve them as a guide and instruction, and to distribute them free of charge. A good Catechism is proposed — short, clear, reasoned — for children; either the short Catechism of Monsignor Colbert, or the one printed in Livorno, is believed suitable.

Another, more extensive Catechism for adults — the so-called universal Catechism of Genoa is thought suitable.

A copy of Holy Scripture translated into the vernacular by Archbishop Martini of Florence, or the one translated from the French of [Louis-Isaac Lemaistre de] Sacy.

The Année Chrétienne of [Nicolas] Le Tourneux.

The Instructions of the Bishop of Soissons on the Sundays and Feasts of the year.

The Treatise on the Sacrifice of the Mass by Bishop Bossuet, and that of Le Tourneux, or the aforesaid Bishop Martini, on the best way to hear it.

The Ritual of Alet, with an Instruction for attending the sick and dying.

The Spiritual Works of Jean-Denis Cochin on charitable associations.

The Moral Reflections on the New Testament of Quesnel.

The System of Christian Doctrine of M. Mésenguy.

A book containing the Epistles and Gospels as distributed across the Feasts of the year, in the vernacular, with brief, easily understood moral explanations, arranged in points to be delivered to the people, of a duration of little more than half an hour.

A collection of discourses on the principal truths of Christianity, suited to the understanding of all, on the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Sacraments, the principal Mysteries of the Faith, the Commandments, and the Rites of the Church on the various solemnities of the year.

A book on the principal Moral duties toward one's neighbor in society, the duties of the married state, the education of children, and the fulfillment of everyone's obligations in their respective state of life.

A book teaching how to conduct oneself with the sick and dying, so as to assist and console them.

A book containing the principal duties of Parish priests themselves, and instruction for the exercise of their important ministry.

Those books of Moral Theology, of the soundest Doctrine, that might be necessary for Parish priests for hearing confessions and resolving Cases.

A copy of Muratori's work On Well-Regulated Devotion.

The course of Moral Theology of Professor Tamburini.

The Ecclesiastical History of [Laurent-François] Racine.

The Discourses of [Bernard] Lambert.

The Duties of the Christian, printed in Rome.

The Customs of the Christians and the Israelites by Fleury.

And the Discourses [prefixed] to Fleury's Ecclesiastical History.

Once the Bishops approve such books, or propose others of the same kind in their place, those that need it shall be translated, and reprinted, and His Royal Highness will have them given as gifts to the Parish priests, with the obligation to preserve them and hand them down to their successors as synodal property.

LV. In the Churches of Convents of Nuns, a Cure shall not, as far as possible, be established.

In their Churches, where there is no Cure, there shall be but a single Altar. All decoration and music shall be forbidden there, and they may not hold Feasts for Saints except with the Bishop's approval, and these without pomp; and sermons for them shall be given with the Church doors closed. It seems fitting that such sermons be limited to the explanation of the Gospel, Catechism, and moral Instruction on all Feasts of full obligation, to be given by their Confessor or Chaplain, along with other instructions or meditations at three or four times of the year for spiritual exercises — Lenten and Advent sermons being excluded.

LVI. The Regular clergy shall never hold any function in their own Churches at the time and hour when Parish functions are held, so as not to draw people away from them; and it seems expedient that they be forbidden both panegyrics and other sermons.

In their Churches there shall be only the High Altar.

They may hold the Feasts of the Saints of their own Order, but never on days of full obligation, nor with extraordinary display or music.

The functions of Holy Week, too, must be held by them at hours different from those of the Cures, and on Holy Thursday it would be fitting for all Regular clergy to go and pay obedience to the Cures in whose territory their Churches are situated.

It might be fitting to require that the Regular clergy, when not themselves holding a Cure, be obliged, whenever called upon to give some sermon or address outside their own Church, to show it beforehand to the Bishop, or to whomever he delegates, in order to obtain approval.

It might likewise be considered whether it would be fitting to prescribe that the Regular clergy not preach or hear confessions in secular Curate Churches unless, besides the Bishop's permission, they also have that of the respective Parish priest.

LVII. The Bishops shall determine, for their respective Dioceses, which Convents of Regular clergy they judge useful to the public service, and the number of Priests, Lecturers, or others they judge necessary in each of them.

The standing orders excluding foreign, non-naturalized Friars from admission to the Convents of Tuscany must be observed.

They shall consider whether it is more useful for Friars to remain dependent on their respective Generals and Provincials — for the greater ease this affords of transferring them, as needed, from one Convent to another, and for the greater subordination they will in that case maintain toward the local Superior — or to make the Convents so many separate, unrelated bodies, and, in that case, how novitiate training and study could be provided for, since not every Convent can establish these.

Regular clergy, for ordination and for their studies, must be totally subordinate to the Bishops, in the same way as secular Priests; they may not exercise the care of souls except that attached to their Convent. When requested by the Bishops to exercise other cures of souls, or Chaplaincies, they must first be secularized.

As far as circumstances permit, it would be fitting for the Bishops not to appoint Regular clergy as Confessors of Nuns.

It would not be fitting for them to be permitted to administer Confession and preach except in their own Churches, or in some Cure in aid of the Parish priest, with his approval, in addition to the Bishop's permission.

It would be necessary for the Bishops, each year, either personally or through Delegates, to visit all the Convents of their Diocese, and to be given an account not only of regular discipline, but also of the studies pursued there.

In the Churches of Regular clergy, apart from the feasts of universal rite of the Church of their Founders and Saints — provided that, even in this respect, there be no superfluous pomp or panegyrics — and apart from the Novenas of the Church's principal solemnities, it seems that every other feast might be forbidden to them.

It would be fitting to restore the Friars to a more regular discipline, by not permitting them to go about alone, nor to spend the night outside the Convent, whether under the pretext of a country stay in a private house or for any other reason. And should they, in some case, wish to spend the night elsewhere, and this not be for attending the sick, or for travel, or some other necessity, they should obtain the written permission of their Superior, which must specify the time and the place for which it is granted.

The dispensations and privileges that Regular clergy might obtain from Rome, for exemptions, ranks, or titles within their order, shall not be admitted in Tuscany. They must serve in aid of the Parish priest at any request of his, whenever the need requires it, attend the functions of the Church, attend the sick, and hear confessions; and for this service they shall be dependent on the respective Parish priest in whose Cure their Convent is situated.

Session III — 20 September 1786

Decree on Faith and the Church — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XVII Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session III, pages 75–83, the opening doctrinal decree of the whole Synod, preceding the Decree on Grace, Predestination, and the Foundations of Morality. It lays out the Synod's Trinitarian and Christological confession, its theory of doctrinal development (the Church can only "guard," never "establish," new dogmas), the limits of ecclesiastical authority over temporal affairs***.**

I. Faith, that most excellent virtue with which begins the admirable chain of graces that direct us toward God, and which is the first voice calling us to salvation and to the Church, must also be the first foundation on which the teachings and decrees of this sacred Assembly are established. We, therefore, gathered in the Holy Spirit, following the examples of the ecumenical and particular Synods that preceded us, shall begin the present Session precisely with this virtue.

II. We confess, then, in the first place, that there is one Eternal, Omnipotent, Immense God, who, remaining in His most simple and single Being, is distinguished into three Persons — the Most Holy Trinity — or, to speak more precisely, who is expressed, according to their personal and incommunicable properties, as Father, Word, and Holy Spirit. In these three Divine Persons we confess a true distinction: the Father existing from Eternity without beginning; the Word begotten by an eternal filiation from the Father, consubstantial with Him; and the divine Spirit proceeding equally from the Father and the Son by an eternal procession. We therefore detest, no less than the ancient heretics who confounded the Persons, or made the Word inferior to the Father, the modern Innovators who, while confessing that the Word is God from eternity, refused to recognize Him as Son except in time. In this divine Son, and through this Son, the Father inherited everything in the order of spirits together with bodies, and it was in this divine Wisdom that the admirable order of providence was formed, which rules and governs all created things.

III. This same Son, taking pity on the miseries of man, fallen into an abyss of ignorance and powerlessness through original sin, without separating Himself from the Father, was born of a Virgin's womb, and, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, took on our human nature and our infirmities — but not our guilt — and made Himself our Redeemer, willing to be weak so as to make us strong, and subjecting Himself to death to restore life to us. But though He assumed

human nature, He did not multiply the person, which always remained one alone, though perfect Man and perfect God. In this God-Man, Jesus Christ, all our hopes are therefore founded, and to this God-Man, no less than to the whole Most Holy Trinity, our prayers must be directed — not dividing them, through a superstitious and erroneous cult, between the divine nature and the human, but venerating the divine Person as one whole, with a single adoration. To adore the humanity of Jesus Christ directly — still more, some part of it — would always be a divine honor given to a creature, and to adore only the divine nature in Jesus Christ would be to separate and divide Him.

IV. But Christ came not only to be our Redeemer, shedding His Blood for mankind and subjecting Himself to death; He came also to found a Priesthood and a Religion, through which we might come to share in the fruit of this same Blood and this death. This Priesthood and this Religion — the subject of so many instructions He gave the Apostles and Disciples over more than three years, and which received their completion and full exercise only after Christ's Ascension into Heaven — entirely did away with and destroyed the old Priesthood and the empty religion of the Synagogue. The new Covenant, founded not on fear and force but on charity and gentleness, did not seek to dominate bodies or terrify with cruelty, but wrote itself upon hearts, so that by the gentle force of love it might persuade minds and enkindle affections.

V. Upon these foundations He established His Church; and, wishing to depart to go to the Father, He entrusted to her the keeping, intact, of the deposit of Faith and Morals He had handed over to her, and promised her His assistance, so that, in times of darkness and shadow, she might distinguish the true doctrine received from Him from the false and seductive doctrine born afterward. These are the two foundations on which the Religion of Christ lives securely amid the continual assaults of external enemies and of the more dangerous internal ones — false brethren. The Church has received her Faith and her Morals from Christ. The Church is assured by Christ that this Faith and these Morals will never fail.

VI. The Religion of Christ is not a human invention, needing use and experience to bring it to perfection, and where time and reflection must remove or supply whatever is excessive or deficient. It is a divine work, designed by a God who made it perfect at the very moment of establishing it. Whatever, therefore, was necessary to believe then had to be believed in later times, and must be believed until the end of the ages; and whatever was then prescribed must always be observed. The Canons of discipline, often made, were not articles forming a substantial part of Religion, but were means judged, according to circumstances and countries, necessary for observing it well. From this principle follows, almost as a demonstration, that maxim so certain and infallible: that in Doctrine and Morals, only what is ancient is true, and whatever was introduced over time is certainly false. The Church will never believe what she did not believe then, nor will she ever cease to profess what she taught then.

VII. It is true that, over the course of the centuries, times of darkness and shadow arise, when the true Doctrine of the Church seems to be smothered and weighed down by errors and by entrenched innovations, because, the Pastors failing to watch, persons either deluded, self-interested, or malicious sow tares. It then seems that truth is failing, and that its defenders are cast down and disheartened; but Christ's promise stands too firm — that the powers of hell will never prevail to corrupt or distort any of the truths Christ placed in the deposit of Faith and Morals entrusted to the Church. In such circumstances, so that the Faithful should not wander in uncertainty, or blindly follow the prevailing falsehood, He left them a living and speaking judge, from whom they could seek light so as not to be deceived.

VIII. This Judge is the Church herself, who, represented by the Body of Pastors, Vicars of Jesus Christ, united to the Ministerial Head, and to their common center, the Roman Pontiff, first among them, received the right to judge and to guide the Faithful in controversies arising over doctrine or morals — a right in whose exercise she will never be deceived, provided she does not depart from the sure rules on which she must rely to judge rightly, namely, the divine word, whether written in the sacred books or preserved by tradition. Such an infallibility in judging and in proposing articles of belief to the Faithful — not granted to any individual, but only to the body of Pastors representing the Church — is the most luminous and august character [of the Church], which the Innovators tried in vain to shake, because it is founded on too clear testimonies of Scripture, and also on the very nature and constitution of the Church.

IX. It would, however, be a very grave error to imagine that when the Church newly proposes something to be believed, or when, amid conflicting opinions, she interposes her judgment and, by solemn Decree, directs the Faithful toward one of them, she is thereby proposing a new article of Faith, or raising to the status of an object of Faith something that was not one before. She does nothing but clear of intermingled errors those truths which she received clear and limpid from Christ Himself, and which were more solemnly established by the Holy Spirit's descent upon the Disciples on the day of Pentecost. The decisions of the first four general Councils, so greatly respected by antiquity, and which we respect no less than antiquity did, and the decisions of all the other Ecumenical Councils that came afterward, did nothing in substance but separate the true doctrine from the innovations of rash men, and set forth, with greater clarity and precision, what the Church had always believed concerning the Articles then in controversy. Had she acted otherwise, she would have abused her authority, and would have forfeited her right to that infallibility which the Lord has granted her.

X. But the faithful need not fear that the Universal Church will ever abuse this authority. That same divine assistance which guarantees her right not to err when she interposes her judgment on Doctrine and Morals also guarantees her, for the same reason, the privilege of not abusing it; and if this assurance were lacking, we would be equally uncertain in our belief, and one could always ask whether the Church had or had not abused her authority, or had departed from the true sources that make her decisions infallible. Such a method would end

up subjecting the decisions of the Universal Church to the whims and the private judgment of every individual Christian.

XI. We acknowledge, then, as a fundamental article of our belief, that the Church — even the universal Church — has no right whatsoever to establish new Dogmas, but only to preserve the ancient ones; and we likewise acknowledge that, in the exercise of this right, she cannot depart from the divine Scriptures and from venerable, uniform Tradition. In such cases every Believer is under a strict obligation to heed her decisions, and to reform his belief whenever it differs from these decisions.

XII. But how can one heed this voice, and reform one's belief, if the decisions themselves were vague, tangled, and obscure? What is to be proposed for the peoples' faith, and is to serve as the foundation on which to build one's own sanctification, must be clear and definite. An uncertain and murky decision would do nothing but multiply divisions and doubts; and it would be a sin, not only against religion but against logic, to demand belief in doctrines whose content is unknown, or to condemn errors not yet identified, or to demand a "limited," "qualified," "indeterminate" belief, and other such phrases, born to corrupt the simple and pure idea of Faith, and to stir up disturbances, despotism, and uncertainties. Should such a case arise, the Faithful have the right to ask for an explanation, and, until it is given precisely, they need not commit themselves in any way to such irregular decisions, but should return, as far as possible, to the sure doctrine of Scripture and Tradition. The wounds inflicted by these indeterminate decisions — introduced, by a most grave innovation, some centuries ago, and sustained, against every rule, by the misfortune of the times, and permitted by divine Providence as a trial and test of His servants — are still too raw. The Church, in her happier days, knew no such improprieties, and sought to instruct and persuade, not to impose and demand blind assent. Those who proposed such decisions to the Faithful, and sought to have them believed sufficiently authoritative, abused the name of the Church. Decrees issued by a particular Church, or by a few Pastors, promoted with less than pure intentions, tending to overturn ancient doctrine, and introduced by irregular and violent means, do not carry the character of the voice of the Church.

XIII. No less an abuse of this authority, however, would be to carry it beyond the bounds of Doctrine and Morals, extending it to external matters, and forcibly demanding what depends on persuasion and the heart. The Divine Redeemer, in forming the Church, did not intend to found a kingdom or a temporal monarchy, and restricted all the powers He gave her to the spiritual order. If the Pastors exceed these limits, they no longer have any right to the promised assistance, and their determinations would be nothing but irregular usurpations, apt to sow scandal and division in society.

XIV. The holy Synod, therefore, while acknowledging the true authority of the Church, solemnly rejects everything that the passions of later centuries added to it, being persuaded that it does not belong to the Church to interfere in the temporal rights of sovereignty, established immediately by God; still less does it belong to her to demand, by force and by

external violence, submission to her Decrees. Such abusive means, besides not being within her competence — since they were not granted to her by Christ — are also unreasonable and disproportionate. The mind is not persuaded by force, nor is the heart reformed by prisons and by fire.

XV. This, in substance, is the summary of what the faithful must believe on this subject, so as not to be carried away by the enormous confusion of not a few Writers who, departing from the purity of Christ's doctrine, followed instead their own notions and rash presumptions, and so confused so clear a subject as to make it the most tangled and obscure. Far from prejudicing the settled rights of the Church, the rule and judge of our belief, we shall always consider it a crime to add what Christ did not wish to add, or to believe otherwise than was believed in better times. We would, however, believe ourselves to be neglecting one of the most valuable and sacred means of fixing these boundaries, were we not to adopt the four celebrated Articles of the Gallican Clergy, which already did such honor to the insight and zeal of the respected Assembly of 1682. They will serve to conclude this first Chapter, and to seal what has been taught, here and there, above.

XVI. We profess, then, together with those wise Prelates:

1. That St. Peter and his Successors, Vicars of Jesus Christ, and the Church herself, have received power from God only over spiritual matters, and those concerning salvation, and not over temporal or civil matters — Jesus Christ Himself teaching us that His Kingdom is not of this world, and, elsewhere, that we must render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God. That we must hold to this precept of the Apostle St. Paul, that everyone be subject to the higher Powers, since there is no Power that does not come from God, and it is He who ordains those that are on earth; and therefore whoever resists the Powers resists the ordinances of God. Consequently, we declare that Kings and Sovereigns are not subject, by this same order of God, to any Ecclesiastical Power in matters concerning the temporal realm; that they cannot be deposed, either directly or indirectly, by the authority of the keys of the Church; that their subjects cannot be exempted from the submission and obedience they owe them, or released from their oath of fidelity; and that this doctrine, necessary for public peace and equally advantageous to Church and State alike, must be held as conforming to Sacred Scripture, to the Tradition of the Fathers of the Church, and to the examples of the Saints.

2. That the fullness of Power which the Holy Apostolic See and the successors of St. Peter, Vicars of Jesus Christ, hold over spiritual things is nevertheless such that the Decrees of the holy Ecumenical Council of Constance, contained in Sessions IV and V, approved by the Holy Apostolic See, confirmed by the practice of the whole Church and of the Roman Pontiffs, and always religiously observed by the Gallican Church, remain in their full force and vigor; and that the Church of France (the Church of Pistoia, and the present holy Synod) does not approve the opinion of those who oppose these Decrees, or seek to weaken them, by saying that their authority is not well established, that they were not approved, or that their general provisions concern only times of schism.

3. That, nevertheless, the use of Apostolic Power must be regulated by Canons made by the Spirit of God, and consecrated by the general respect of the whole world; that the rules, customs, and constitutions received in the Kingdom (in the State) and in the Gallican Church (and in the Church of Pistoia) must retain their force and value, and that the usages of our Fathers must remain unaltered; and that it is likewise in the interest of the greatness of the Holy Apostolic See that the laws and customs established with the consent of this See and of the Church have the authority proper to them.

4. Although the Pope has the principal part in questions of Faith, and his Decrees concern all Churches, and each Church in particular, his judgment is not irreformable unless the consent of the Church is joined to it.

XVII. On these principles, so well established by the respectable Clergy of France, the holy Synod can only applaud the enlightened piety of our most Religious Sovereign, who, intent on further promoting the public good and benefit, abolished, by his Royal Motu Proprio of 28 August 1784, the Extravagante Ambitiosae [a medieval papal decretal], as having arisen to confound the idea of the two Powers, which our Head and Founder Jesus Christ willed to be absolutely distinct.

Decree on Grace, Predestination, and the Foundations of Morality — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XXII Articles + Theological Articles of the Louvain Faculty + The Twelve Articles presented to Benedict XIII by Cardinal de Noailles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session III, pages 84–100, immediately following the Decree on Faith and the Church. This decree commits the Synod explicitly to the Augustinian theology of grace against Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, works out its practical consequences for confessors (rigorist rules on ignorance, probability, relapse, and readiness for absolution), and then — remarkably — formally adopts two external sets of articles to close off doctrinal suspicion: the* ***Theological Articles of the Louvain Faculty*** *(presented to Innocent XI in 1677) and the* ***Twelve Articles*** *presented to Benedict XIII by Cardinal de Noailles. The latter includes the well-known article on the reading of Scripture.*

I. One of the greatest objects of Synods is to maintain the purity and unity of Faith and Morals. In recent centuries a general darkening has spread over the most important truths of Religion, which are the foundation of the faith and Morals of Jesus Christ. It is therefore necessary to return to the purity of principles that have been obscured by introduced novelties, so as to establish in our Diocese that uniformity of Doctrine which will be an edification to the faithful, and to which the wishes of our most religious Prince tend. It matters greatly, as the Sovereign wisely observes, to the governance of souls, that all Ecclesiastics hold the same principles of Morals and the same maxims at the Tribunal of Penance. But, owing to the mutual dependence and affinity between Morals and dogmatic principles, the desired uniformity of practical maxims can never be achieved without having, as its basis, the identity of dogmatic theories.

II. To establish this unity of principles, the enlightened Sovereign suggests to the Bishops that the Doctrine of St. Augustine be taken as the norm, particularly against the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians, who by their systems destroyed the spirit of the Religion of Jesus Christ, and preached a new Gospel both in Dogma and in Morals. We, therefore, holding to this sure rule preserved by the Universal Church, authorized by Synods and by the Roman Pontiffs, after having professed with heart and tongue all the articles on which the uniformity of the Church has been settled, shall give a brief account of the most important truths upheld, in the Church's name, by the holy Doctor, which afterward, through men's capricious systems, lost their currency — a disastrous cause of the ruin of Christian Morals. These truths will form the series of sure principles from which the practical maxims to be observed in the governance of souls will descend as so many conclusions.

III. All of Religion consists in the knowledge of the first and the second Adam. These two objects form the whole plan of the Religion of Jesus Christ. For this reason our Fathers said that the Pelagians, by having corrupted the right notions of these two objects, were said to overturn the whole of what we are as Christians. The fall of the first Adam, then, and the reparation worked through the second, are the two points of view we must always keep before us, in order to draw from them the right ideas of the human heart, of its ailments, of the fitting remedies, and of their application, and to build upon these ideas our whole plan of conduct for directing the souls entrusted to us. One cannot heal an illness one does not know, nor can a remedy be used fruitfully unless its nature, character, and mode of action are understood.

IV. The first man was created by God in a state of happy innocence, nor could he have come otherwise from the hands of the Creator. The idea of any other state is fanciful, degrades humanity, and directly contradicts the perfections of a sovereign providence. Faith teaches us that Adam was constituted in righteousness and charity. He therefore loved his Creator, and had within himself no contrary inclination. Full, then, of heavenly light and love, he enjoyed a blessed ease in persevering in good. He would have been immortal had he in fact persevered, and the choice depended entirely on himself. God willed to place him in a perfect equilibrium of powers, in order to demonstrate through him the value of free will. This notion of "equilibrium" has been a stumbling-block on which the enemies of the Grace of Jesus Christ have run aground. The notion of primitive freedom, applied to our present state, has been the unhappy source from which so many monstrous systems concerning Predestination and Grace, and so many false maxims in Morals, have sprung.

V. Adam, though placed in the greatest possible ease of not sinning, sinned nonetheless. He fell in love with his own gifts, took pleasure in himself, and forgot his sovereign Benefactor. Such was Adam's sin — a most grave sin, as St. Augustine observes, because committed by him amid such an abundance of light, and by the most entirely free decision of his sound and perfect will. Man abandoned his God, and found himself in disorder. Seeking to recover his lost happiness, he fell back again and again upon himself, and, not being sufficient to himself for happiness, burned with love for external things, which he made into his own center and final end. Having thus lost the way to blessedness, he wound himself from darkness into darkness, from error into error, from sin into sin, ever powerless to free himself from that love which bound him to himself. These are the two very deep wounds that followed upon the first sin: ignorance and concupiscence.

VI. But the first man, by his sin, harmed not only himself, but all his descendants as well. Being changed for the worse in body and soul, he transmitted his ills to his posterity. For, as St. Augustine says, it would not have been just for him to beget better than he himself was. The infected root was bound to produce spoiled and corrupted fruit. According to the order of generation, then, he transmitted to his children ignorance of the good and a vicious inclination to evil. These two defects follow every creature that comes into the world. Hence every child of Adam, being born with a disordered will, is born a child of the wrath of God — to whom disorder cannot be pleasing — and is born guilty in His sight, and worthy of eternal

separation from the supreme Good, and therefore of eternal death, to which even infants who die without Baptism are condemned.

VII. Ignorance and concupiscence, then, are the two wounds that original sin has brought upon us. They are two defects that could not have belonged to nature as such, but are only the inheritance of guilt. They come to us from sin, and are the unhappy cause of our sins. Pelagius could not conceive how ignorance of the good, born with us and necessarily transmitted according to the order of generation — on account of which man errs unwillingly and remains as he is — should fail to excuse sin. But he was obliged, if he wished to be held a Catholic, to abjure this heresy at the Synod of Palestine. It is, then, most certain that such ignorance, in everything regarding the natural law, does not excuse from sin, since it can always be overcome — as the Fathers teach — if not by the powers of nature alone, then at least with the help of grace; and, moreover, it always presupposes a depravity of soul on account of which either the natural means of overcoming it are neglected, or grace is refused to us.

VIII. The second, deeper wound is concupiscence. This is a movement of the soul to take pleasure in itself and in created things not for God's sake. It is, then, an affection of the soul contrary to right order, and evil in itself. It comes from sin, and inclines us to sin; and although it is not imputed as guilt except when it drags the will along with it, it remains nonetheless an evil that is born with us and that rules within us until charity is breathed into us. Hence man without Grace is under the slavery of sin, since, cupidity ruling in his heart, however far he may be carried outside himself, in the last analysis he always falls back upon himself, refers everything to himself, and, through the general influence of his ruling love, spoils and corrupts all his actions. In this state man has nothing of his own but sin, darkness, and vanity. These maxims may seem harsh to human pride and to the philosophy of the age, but they are truths taught by Jesus Christ, and handed down to us by the Councils and the Fathers.

IX. This unhappy portrait of the children of Adam helps us understand the price of the Redemption of Jesus Christ. It helps us grasp the necessity and the efficacy of His grace. Fallen man would never have risen again, but would have remained crushed beneath his ruin, had the Lord's mercy not thought to lift him up. Blinded in intellect, and attached in heart to himself, he had no power to raise himself to God, from whom he had departed. The Lord could justly have abandoned him to his misery, yet God willed to show mercy to mankind, and established a plan of Redemption; but this plan was a free effect of His infinite goodness. He willed to establish it as He pleased. It is not, then, from the capricious systems of men, but from the sources of divine revelation, that we must learn the economy of divine Providence for saving the human race.

X. After Adam's fall, God announced the promise of a future Liberator. He willed to console the human race with the hope of the salvation Jesus Christ was to bring us. Jesus Christ was thus the object of the hopes and the faith of those few whom God chose, amid the corruption of the age, as the firstfruits of the fair days of righteousness; but the Lord willed that the

human race pass through various states before the fullness of time arrived. He willed that man, left to his own lights, should learn to distrust his blind reason, and, from the errors into which he fell, be moved to desire the help of a higher light. This was the state of nature, in which man did not know sin, and let himself be led by his concupiscence without recognizing it. God willed to give him a law that would make him know sin. But man, being powerless to observe it, became, under the law, a transgressor. Crime thus abounded all the more, both because the law forbidding it inflamed the desire to sin, and because to sin was added transgression — that is, contempt for the law. This law, then, did not form righteous men, but made transgressors; it did not create children, but made slaves — not through the fault of the law, which was most holy, but through the fault of man, who, under the law without Grace, became all the more a sinner. But if the law did not succeed in healing man's heart, it served to make him know his ills, to convince him of his weakness, and to make him desire the grace of the Mediator. The law, then, was given by God through the ministry of Moses, not to heal man's wounds, but to warn him of his sickness and of the need for a remedy.

XI. The fullness of time arrived; He chose the Only-begotten from the Father's bosom, and brought us salvation. *The Law was given through Moses, but grace through Jesus Christ*. From the nature of the disease we can know the nature and efficacy of the healing grace of Jesus Christ. Ignorance had to be driven out by light, and concupiscence overcome by charity. Grace, then, enlightens us, makes us know the good, and urges us to follow it. Here the wound of the intellect is healed. But it is not enough to know the good in order to follow it; indeed, with earthly love ruling in our soul, the light of grace, when alone, serves only to make us know the unhappiness of our state and the weight of our affliction. Grace, in that case, produces the same effect the Law produced. If the good that is known is not loved, *it is not acted upon, it is not taken up*; it is therefore necessary that the Lord create in our heart a holy love, and inspire a holy delight contrary to the love that rules us. This holy love, this holy delight, is properly the grace of Jesus Christ: *it is the inspiration of charity, by which, once known, we act out of holy love*. This is the root from which good works germinate; this is the grace of the New Testament, which frees us from the slavery of sin and makes us children of God.

XII. In the light of these truths taught us by St. Augustine in his works against the Pelagians, we learn what the sickness of the human heart consists in, and what its cure is. We understand that there are in man two loves, like two roots, from which all actions are produced: cupidity and charity — the former a bad root that can produce nothing but bad fruits, the latter the good root that alone produces good works; that where charity does not reign, there concupiscence rules, and conversely. Secondly, from the plan established by God for man's salvation, we know the gratuitousness of Grace and of the Predestination of the Saints — a capital truth upheld by the Church against the proud of this age, and which forms, as it were, the foundation of Religion and of all Christian virtues. Thirdly, we learn the efficacy of Grace: that it does not depend on our will, but produces our willing in us; that by its omnipotent power *it makes the unwilling willing*; that, far from waiting for our consent,

grace creates that very consent in us, since *it works in us both to will and to accomplish*; that without it we can not only not complete, but not even begin, a good work — indeed, we cannot even conceive the thought of one; that from the first movement of good will to the completion of the work, everything is the gift of this divine power, which, without violating the rights of free will, draws us out of the slavery of sin and gives us the happy freedom to work out our salvation. We therefore adopt, as two fundamental articles of St. Augustine's doctrine, the gratuitous Predestination of the Elect, and the intrinsic efficacy of the Grace of Jesus Christ.

XIII. These are the theories which, following St. Augustine, we believe it right to establish, so as then to descend to the maxims to be followed in morals. If ignorance of the Law of God is a punishment for sin, and not an excuse for it, then man must be considered guilty whenever he sins against the natural Law, even if he is ignorant of it, or fails to advert to it, or doubts it. Here, then, is a most certain rule of morals: ignorance, inadvertence, and probability cannot excuse a sin committed against the precepts of the natural law. The darkness and obscurity surrounding our intellect are a just punishment for sin, and therefore cannot be invoked to excuse that same sin. Man is therefore obliged to use every means to find the truth, which is the sole rule of our actions. Amid darkness and doubt he must follow the side favoring the law, and must never resolve to act unless he has moral certainty of the rightness of the action. Whoever is convinced of the just penalty for sin knows clearly that he cannot secure himself from the danger of sinning without holding to the above rules, dictated by good sense, taught by the Fathers, and constantly observed by the Church without contradiction until recent times — when, as Pope Alexander VII observes, an unbridled freedom of opinion was introduced, contrary to the simplicity of the Gospel and the doctrine of the Fathers, which has for so long made the bride of Jesus Christ groan amid a flood of the most licentious opinions in every part of morals.

XIV. Secondly, from the plan of Redemption established for man's salvation, we note the necessity of Faith in Jesus Christ, and of the related Mysteries, for justification. Whoever, therefore, is ignorant of these Mysteries is incapable of absolution. Woe, then, to Pastors who do not take care to instruct the People in the Christian Faith, which is the foundation of salvation. It is vain to dispute over the depth of God's just judgments, who grants Faith to whom He wills, and by a just judgment withholds it from others. It is enough for us to know that God has established this as the means of bringing salvation, and that without it there is no ground for hoping for it — from which follows the necessity of instructing our People, and the incapacity of those who are ignorant of the fundamental mysteries of our Faith to be admitted to the Sacraments.

XV. From the truths set forth in the preceding article, it is also easy to form a right idea of the sickness of the human heart, and of Christian righteousness. Ruling cupidity is the sickness of the soul; charity is the medicine that heals it. On this idea we have a rule for judging the healing of the heart. When we have unmistakable signs of the love of God ruling in a man's heart, we may reasonably judge him worthy to be admitted to partake of the Blood of Jesus Christ, given in the Sacraments. But it is quite clear that fear of punishment, mere servile

attrition, is not enough to heal a soul attached, by a ruling love, to created things. *Opposites are cured by their opposites*. The love of sin is not overcome except by the love of righteousness. Fear can restrain the hand, but cannot heal the heart. Hence supposed conversions worked by artifice will be neither effective nor lasting. Knowledge of the human heart, and daily experience, convince us of this truth. The Pastor of souls must, therefore, hold to unmistakable signs of a ruling charity before admitting his Penitents to the Sacraments.

XVI. The Gospel tells us that the signs by which to judge the conversion of the heart are works: *By their fruits you shall know them*. This, then, is the rule to be observed at the Tribunal of Penance. Promises, tears, and protestations on the part of Penitents are signs common to anyone who approaches the Sacrament; only works can give a morally certain indication of conversion. When the love of God has taken possession of the soul, it is active and effective: *Love, if it exists, acts; if it does not act, it does not exist*. The holy, ruling passion produces, in man's relation to God, the same effects that ruling cupidity usually produces in relation to earthly things.

XVII. The plan God followed in bringing salvation to mankind teaches Pastors another very important truth: that the conversion of the heart is not ordinarily worked by God except by degrees. St. Augustine compares the way the Lord led the human race through various states until the fullness of time, or of salvation, with the way He deals with us in the conversion of sinners. We must, then, keep before our eyes the three states in which sinners present themselves at the Sacrament of Penance: the state of ignorance, the state of the law, and the state of grace. Remedies must be applied, and dispositions judged, according to which of these states the person is in. If he does not know sin, or does not feel its gravity and the misery of his unhappy state, then it is time for instruction, for meditation on heavenly truths, and for the strongest exhortations, to make him sensitive to his sickness. If he knows sin, and groans under the slavery of his bad habits, it is a practice full of prudence and charity to give him time to feel the weight of his sins, to humble him before God, and to urge him, through prayer, to recognize the need for the grace that alone can free him from his slavery. If, finally, he begins to detest sin, and struggles and fights against his concupiscence, he passes into the state of grace. But this grace is not always, nor immediately, triumphant. God does not inspire ruling love in a single instant. He trains it for the struggle through the movements of a still-infant charity. Hence the efforts to overcome, and the relapses. We must take care not to suppress these seeds of divine love, but to nourish them with prayer and the exercises of piety, until charity, grown to adulthood and strength, comes to overcome the contrary love. And it is then that the Pastor will be able to discern it from a stable cessation of sin, and from fervor in good works.

XVIII. From the nature of Grace, which converts the heart to God, it is also easy to understand that a true conversion of the heart is not fleeting, inconstant, and unstable, as is commonly thought, but that it has a certain consistency and stability; and that, although not incapable of being lost, it is not lost so easily or so often. A passion that takes possession of the soul, that comes to dominate the heart, that draws to itself the greater part of our thoughts

and affections, is not ordinarily subject to easy and repeated changes. We have daily examples of this in earthly passions, whenever they become dominant and lord over the human heart. Now charity is no weaker than the other passions: *Love is strong as death*. The holy love inspired in us by the Lord's mercy, once it comes to rule our affections, knows how to overcome obstacles and conquer contrary delights. To think it so weak that it is extinguished by any passing breath is to be ignorant of the nature of charity, and to do wrong to the efficacy of God's gifts. These maxims lead us not to trust too readily those penitents who, although they strive to rise from their sins, nonetheless fall back into them from time to time, and tend to make a cycle of confessions and relapses. Let us not be deceived by a misunderstood weakness of the human heart. Charity, sustained by the Lord's omnipotent grace, becomes strong and robust, and does not so easily yield to the trial of earthly passions. The Confessor's practice regarding repeat offenders must be regulated by these notions.

XIX. Rash and imprudent absolutions come, for the most part, from false notions of freedom and grace. If man is regarded as in a kind of equilibrium, endowed with equal power for good and for evil, one is forced to disregard the deep corruption of the human heart, and the substance of those disordered affections regarding which our own inner sense, and continual experience, attest that we have no such equilibrium. The true sickness of the human soul thus disappears from view, and only the outward materiality of external actions is considered. On the other hand, if grace is made dependent on free will, and tied to the consent of the will, it becomes too easy to believe the protestations of a Penitent who claims to be repentant and to wish to sin no more. The idea of a grace placed in man's hands, and subject in its effect to free will, must necessarily open the way to a hasty readiness to absolve Penitents. It matters greatly, then, for the Confessor's conduct in the governance of souls, always to keep in mind the right notions of the slavery of sin, under which free will groans after Adam's fall, and of the nature of grace, its strength, its gratuitousness, and the manner in which it heals the human heart.

XX. From these same dogmatic principles we can draw many other lessons for the guidance of both Priest and Penitents. From the victorious strength of the grace of Jesus Christ we learn never to despair of the conversion of the most obstinate sinners, not to grow weary of their weaknesses and relapses, but to pray the Lord ever more urgently to bring to full completion, in them, the victory over their ruling cupidity. We learn to comfort Penitents with the hope of divine help, to place all their confidence in the Lord's hands, and not to lose heart however strong their ingrained habits may be. From the gratuitousness of grace we learn to adore the judgments of God, to hold firmly to the rules prescribed by Jesus Christ in the administration of the Sacraments, awaiting patiently the Lord's mercies. We learn to instill, in the soul of one who trusts too much in himself, a salutary fear, since *let each one work out his salvation with fear and trembling*. In sum, we have in the truths set forth an inexhaustible resource from which to draw fitting instruction according to the various occasions, both our own and those of the souls entrusted to us. On these truths rests the exercise of all Christian virtues. With

their help fear, humility, hope, and confidence in God are stirred up. With them gratitude toward the Lord is awakened, and charity toward God and neighbor is kindled.

XXI. It is, then, no wonder that, these foundations having been shaken in our times, the whole edifice of the Christian Religion has suffered great harm from it. The ideas of Liberty, Grace, and Predestination having been altered, the maxims of Morals have been altered along with them, and there has been introduced that unrestrained readiness to absolve which is the most fertile cause of the ills the Church suffers. The true idea of Christian righteousness has been lost, and the spirit of Religion, which consists in charity, extinguished; nothing remains but a vain semblance of Pharisaic righteousness, and the bare name of Christian virtues. Through men's various imaginings, and various capricious systems on the matters indicated, a Babylon has been introduced — a confusion of capricious maxims in every part of morals, and particularly in the administration of penance. Most eminent Theologians of France and Italy have shown with evidence how such a change came about through the interconnection of principles.

XXII. For this reason, wishing to return to simplicity and uniformity in practical rules, we have resolved to adopt the principles set forth in Article Two, which will serve as the basis of our conduct in the governance of souls. We are all the more assured of their truth, following the doctrine of St. Augustine, which the Church has always preserved as a precious inheritance left to her by the Lord, and has always, as such, proposed and recommended to the Faithful, as can be seen from various Decrees of the Supreme Pontiffs Clement VIII, Paul V, Alexander VII, Innocent XI, Benedict XIII, and Clement XIII. But since, in these recent times, the spirit of partisanship has sown endless suspicions concerning the articles of the purest doctrine, and concerning the most orthodox writers, we believe it fitting — *to stop the mouths of those who speak unjust things* — to adopt certain Doctrinal Articles presented by the Faculty of Louvain in the year 1677 to Pope Innocent XI, and likewise the twelve Articles presented to Pope Benedict XIII by Cardinal de Noailles. For, it being very well known throughout Europe that these Articles were subjected, in Rome itself, to the most rigorous examination, and that they emerged not only free of any censure, but were even commended by the aforesaid Supreme Pontiffs, we believe that, by adopting them, we shall close the mouths of the enemies of the purest doctrines — as we set them forth below.

Theological Articles of the Louvain Faculty

On Ignorance, Probability, and Inadvertence Regarding the Malice of Human Acts

1. We all, from birth, carry within us these two defects: concupiscence, and ignorance of the natural law.

2. Just as there is no concupiscence that cannot be overcome, so there is no ignorance of the natural law that is invincible.

3. For just as one can resist any concupiscence by the strength of God's Grace, so, by the light of this same Grace, one can overcome any ignorance.

4. Hence works done, as a result of this ignorance, against the Law of God, can never be fully excused from sin — not even under the pretext of having followed some plausible or probable opinion.

5. At most it might happen that what, in other circumstances, would be mortal sin, given such ignorance, would be only venial.

6. This, however, is not to be understood of sins contrary to the first principles, and to the most manifest precepts, of the natural and eternal law.

7. On this point St. Augustine, in his *Unfinished Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans*, teaches that sins of the flesh can never, on account of ignorance, be exempt from mortal malice, even in adolescents and children.

8. That if an action contrary to the eternal and natural law is never fully excusable on account of ignorance of that law, still less will it be excusable on account of mere inadvertence, or failure to reflect on its malice.

On the Theological Virtues

1. The fundamental and primary precept of the eternal Law is this: You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and your neighbor as yourself.

2. Although by Charity some Scholastics understand only a love consisting in man's friendship with God, brought about through the remission of sins, St. Augustine and the other Fathers, however, use this term to mean any chaste love of the supreme Good for its own sake.

3. Hence the same holy Doctor distinguishes various degrees of charity: newborn charity, nourished charity, advanced charity, robust charity, and perfect charity; and this last is, according to the same Saint, likewise of two kinds — one proper to the present life, the other to the life to come.

4. Charity, then, and cupidity, taken in general, are nothing other than good will and bad will, the good root and the bad root — the latter able to produce only bad fruits, the former only good ones.

5. Every work, to be fully good, and free even from every venial sin, must proceed from such charity, and through it must be referred to God, since, by the testimony of St. Augustine, that fruit is never good which does not spring from the root of charity.

6. It is not necessary, however, that this referral of our actions to God be made through perfect charity; it suffices that it be made through imperfect charity.

7. Nor, likewise, is it necessary that this direction be made with an actual movement of charity — that is, with a charity actually and consciously reflected upon.

8. For such continual reflection on our actions is impossible amid the many distractions of the present life

9. It is enough, then, that our actions be referred to God with a virtual charity.

10. This continual virtual love must regard not only God, but also one's neighbor. God forbid that Christian righteousness should be limited to merely not hating one's neighbor, or to rendering him only outward services.

11. We are under an equal obligation to exercise Faith no less than Hope, and we are likewise bound to remain continually united, through these two virtues as well, to the divine Majesty, at least virtually.

12. Faith must be a most certain persuasion. St. Clement of Alexandria teaches that it must be more certain and more stable than any demonstration. Hence whoever holds that Faith could be merely a probable opinion stands already condemned in the person of Peter Abelard.

13. Faith must not be a natural faith, or any faith taken in a broad sense, but must be entirely supernatural, resting on the authority of the word of God, by which we believe everything that has been revealed or promised to us by God.

14. The Faith necessary for justification and salvation must have as its object God, one in essence and distinct in three Persons; God the rewarder; and Christ the mediator. It must know, and confess, His Incarnation, Passion, Death, Resurrection, etc.

15. Explicit Faith in all these truths is a necessary means of obtaining justification. Whoever is ignorant of even one of these points, though baptized, still belongs to that number of whom the Angel once said to St. Peter of Alexandria: "Why do you cast down these empty purses here?"

16. Hence Bishops, Priests, Parish priests, and other Directors of souls are most strictly obliged to instruct the faithful people fully in all these things — a command deservedly renewed by the Council of Trent.

The Twelve Articles presented to Benedict XIII by Cardinal de Noailles

1. After Adam's sin, no one has been able to acquire true righteousness and eternal salvation without Faith in the Mediator and Redeemer, which had to be more or less explicit and distinct according to the diversity of times and persons.

2. The law of Moses did not, by its own power, confer the grace necessary to fulfill the Precepts of God.

3. No one resists the absolute will of God.

4. In order that, in the state of corrupted nature, man's free will be capable of meriting or of sinning, it is not required that he possess an equal facility for good and evil, nor an equal inclination to each, nor an equilibrium of strength and power in the will.

5. Many celebrated Theologians hold, without danger of error, that at times all interior grace is withdrawn from the blind and hardened of heart as punishment for prior sins. Let no one, however, dare deny that those who, deprived of any grace, commit grave sins, are truly guilty before God.

6. The principal foundation of Religion is the precept of the love of God, a precept distinct from the others.

7. The direction of all our actions to God is a true precept, not a mere counsel; nor is it enough, to fulfill it, to refer our works to God only interpretively.

8. He who, being ignorant of God, or not actually thinking of God, or not expressly attending to the malice of the action, commits some grave sin, truly offends God.

9. Those who, in the Sacrament of Penance, do not believe necessary that love of God which the Second Council of Orange and the Council of Trent require of adults for the reception of justification in Baptism, do not keep to the sure path of salvation.

10. It is in keeping with the Precepts of the Gospel and the laws of the Church to defer the act of absolution for Penitents guilty of most grave or public sins; for those in a habitual state, or in proximate occasion, of mortal sin; who, through their own fault, refuse or delay to lay aside enmities, to restore goods, reputation, or honor taken from their neighbor, or to repair scandals; for those who show doubtful signs of sincere conversion, or who neglect to learn the Mysteries of the Faith or the Precepts of Christian life; and, finally, in general, for all whom a prudent Confessor judges not to be disposed as they ought to be.

11. The reading of Sacred Scripture is certainly useful in itself, but it is not necessary for every single person for the attainment of salvation. Nor is it lawful for anyone to interpret Scripture according to his own private fancy, or according to private judgment, or to read it without the deference and obedience owed to the Pastors, or without sincere submission to the Church, to whom belongs the judgment of the true sense and the correct interpretation of Scripture.

> *[Since this article, given the natural indolence and neglect of the Faithful, might be understood too broadly, the holy Synod thought it well to note that, while the reading of Sacred Scripture should not be said to be necessary for absolutely everyone, nothing excuses one from so important a reading except genuine incapacity. The testimony of the holy Fathers on so important a subject is far too decisive, and the*

darkening of the primary truths of Religion caused by such neglect, and by ignorance of the divine Scriptures, is far too evident.]

12. If some excommunication openly prevents or forbids the exercise of some true virtue, or turns one away from the observance of some true precept, it must be judged unjust, and consequently invalid, according to the Canons of the Church.

Session IV — 22 September 1786

Decree on the Sacraments in General — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XV Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session IV, pages 105–109, the opening decree of the session, preceding the individual decrees on Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. It lays out the Synod's general theology of sacramental signs — from natural religion, through the sacraments of the Mosaic Law, to the seven sacraments of the New Covenant — together with standard Tridentine positions on validity, sacramental character, and the value of liturgical ceremonies.*

I. In every age a Religion was necessary, which, by means of certain sensible signs, might raise man to his Creator, and confirm him in the contemplation of invisible things — it being true, as St. Augustine teaches, that men could never join together to form a society of religion, whether true or false, without certain outward signs, which would serve as a common token, and let one another know that all professed the same Religion. This necessity increased still further after Adam's fall. Having lost his original innocence, and that interior righteousness which had constituted him in a state of happiness and peace, he needed other means and signs to bring him, in some way, back into his former state of holiness.

II. These signs, or Sacraments — which, besides what they present to the senses, give rise in the mind to the idea of another thing which they signify — had to have as their object faith in Christ the Mediator, to which was joined the promise of the righteousness He was to merit for us in due time. We declare, then, that these Sacraments also had to be signs promising the Savior, and the salvation He was to bring.

III. We are therefore persuaded that even those worshippers of the true God who lived before the written Law had some sensible sign, by which to provide for the spiritual salvation of their children, and to apply to them faith in the coming Mediator — to which alone righteousness was attached — to unite them to the society of believers, and to show that they too belonged to the divine promises.

IV. This sign, attesting to faith in the Mediator, was more expressly determined and prescribed by God in the Law given to the Hebrew People through Moses, and other sacred signs, or Sacraments, were added to it by God Himself, in order to bind more closely together the members composing the Hebrew People, to distinguish them from Idolaters, and by which faith in Christ, the future Redeemer, might be expressed more clearly and distinctly.

V. But since all these Sacraments, instituted by God in the Mosaic Law, belonged properly to the state of the Jewish People, for whom, according to St. Paul, everything that happened or was prescribed was a figure and a shadow of what was to come, once the fullness of time had arrived, we believe that their whole force and power consisted only in attesting to, and stirring up, faith in this future Redeemer — a faith to which alone righteousness was attached — in prefiguring the grace He was to bring, and in foretelling what was to be fulfilled, especially the Passion, death, and resurrection of the Redeemer. These figures having now all been fulfilled, and Grace having been brought to the World by the coming of Jesus Christ, it follows that we must believe — as indeed we do believe — that these Sacraments have been taken away and abrogated.

VI. We believe, however, at the same time, with the Catholic Church, that others have been substituted for these by Jesus Christ Himself — fewer in number, indeed, but easier to practice, more advantageous, and more effective — which are likewise public, sensible signs, and serve as a token for all the members of this great Congregation, which is the Church, so that they may join together and be initiated into the sacred service of Jesus Christ our Head; to remind us of the covenant God has made with us, and to warn us to live rightly; and, finally, to stir up our faith, to increase our confidence in the divine promises, to promise the grace they contain, and to foretell the glory we hope for.

VII. We confess, therefore, that there is in the Sacraments of the new Covenant, by divine institution, the power and virtue to confer, on those who approach them with the due dispositions, the grace they promise; and that this is precisely their distinguishing character from those of the Old Testament. The first of these dispositions for obtaining justification is faith, according to the Apostle's saying: *without faith it is impossible to please God*; and Jesus Christ willed that the beginning, the increase, and the restoration of this justification should depend on the power of these Sacraments.

VIII. Resting on the Holy Scriptures, and principally on the Tradition of the Fathers, and on the unanimous consent not only of all the particular Catholic Churches, but also of those which, separated from us, have for many centuries lived in the East, and, finally, on the express definition of the Holy Council of Trent, we believe that these Sacraments — the channels established by Jesus Christ to communicate to us His justifying grace — are neither more nor fewer than seven; and, numbered according to the order followed by Eugene IV in his Decree for the instruction of the Armenians, and by the aforesaid Council of Trent, we say these are Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, and Matrimony — three of which, namely Baptism, Confirmation, and Order, besides the sanctifying grace they have in common with the other four, produce a further effect proper to them, even in those who receive them without the due dispositions: this is the character, or spiritual and indelible sign, which they imprint upon our soul, and on account of which they cannot be received more than once.

IX. As regards the necessity of these seven Sacraments, we confess that they are all necessary, within the order established by Jesus Christ, though not to an equal degree; and we admit that some of them are not necessary for individual members of the Church, but only for her body as a whole.

X. Believing that the respective element, or other sensible thing or action, of each Sacrament, together with the respective words that sanctify it, constitute the essence and substance of the Sacrament, the holy Synod likewise believes that neither the particular ministers to whom their administration is entrusted, nor even the whole body of the Church, can substantially change the matter, or element, and the words of any Sacrament, without abolishing it; indeed, it is persuaded that no Minister may ever, without grave sin, make use of a doubtful element, except in the administration of Sacraments of absolute necessity, should the certain element happen to be lacking.

XI. Although the holy Synod acknowledges that all Christians are, in a certain sense, priests — because all can and must offer spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God, and because, although not all consecrate the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the visible Sacrifice of the Altar, all who are present at it nonetheless offer the immaculate Lamb — it nevertheless believes that not all the Faithful constitute the visible priesthood of Jesus Christ in His Church.

XII. Since Priests, in the administration of the Sacraments, represent the person of Jesus Christ Himself — for it is properly He alone who, through their agency, baptizes, confirms, etc. — the holy Synod therefore believes that, whenever the sign prescribed for each Sacrament is observed by them with the intention of doing what the Church does, the Sacrament is valid, and confers grace on whoever receives it worthily, even though the one administering it may lack faith, or be stained before God with mortal sin.

XIII. In such a case, however, we believe that the Minister renders himself guilty of a further grave sin, since it is written that *holy things must be treated in a holy manner*; we therefore urge all those charged with the administration of the Sacraments to strive to lead a pure, chaste, and blameless life, so that they may always be ready to fulfill their office in a holy manner — bearing in mind St. Paul's precept given to Titus: *A Bishop must be without reproach*, and, regarding Deacons, to Timothy: *let these first be tested, and then let them minister, having no charge against them*.

XIV. And since holy things must be treated in a holy manner, and without exposing them to profanation, the Synod, while urging Ministers to make themselves ready, promptly and willingly, and out of pure Christian charity, for the administration of the Sacraments, also urges them to examine carefully whether the due dispositions are present in those who request them, and, to that end, to meditate continually on the holy Scriptures and to study Tradition, so as ever better to understand the nature, character, and effects of the Sacraments themselves.

XV. Finally, the holy Synod believes that the sacred ceremonies with which the Church has always been accustomed to accompany the administration of the Sacraments are not an invention of the Devil; and, considering that all of them serve to instill in the Faithful a greater veneration for the Sacraments themselves, and that many of them serve to express to us their nature, power, and effects, and to confirm various other dogmas of our belief, it is therefore persuaded that, when these ceremonies are public and approved either by the universal Church or by the respective particular Church, they cannot be despised without sin, nor may anyone change them or substitute others by private authority. It therefore wills that, except in cases of extreme necessity, every Minister must inviolably observe all those ceremonies prescribed, or to be prescribed, in the new Ritual of this Diocese, and that he explain their meaning to the People from time to time.

Decree on Baptism — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XXIV Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session IV, pages 110–116, between the Decree on the Sacraments in General and the Decree on Confirmation. It opens with a stark statement of original sin (Articles I–IV), moves to the necessity and effects of Baptism (V–VI), practical discipline around its administration — timeliness, parish baptisteries, emergency baptism by midwives, baptismal registers (VII–XIII) — the baptism of adults and catechumens (XIV–XIX), godparents (XX–XXI), and the giving of Christian names (XXII–XXIII), closing with a brief note on the churching of women after childbirth (XXIV).*

I. Since the Apostle Paul says that all men have sinned in Adam, we believe that the original stain, contracted by everyone conceived by the will of the flesh and of blood, is not merely a kind of unhappiness and misery, but a true mortal guilt and an injustice, which makes man, by his very nature, a child of wrath and of the just vengeance of God.

II. And indeed, instructed by the same Apostle, we regard death not as a natural condition of man, but as a just punishment for original guilt; and we believe that the many evils that afflict mankind in this life are likewise punishments for that same guilt, as are also our innate ignorance and the concupiscence that drags us toward sin.

III. And since the Kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom of holiness and righteousness, in which the slightest stain can have no place; and since all the Holy Scriptures reduce all men to only two classes — the Elect and the Reprobate, the Righteous and sinners — and to only two positions at the final Judgment, right and left, the one for the former, the other for the latter; and, finally, to two destined places of abode — the Kingdom of Heaven itself, prepared by God for the Elect from all Eternity, and Hell, to burn there in the company of the Devil and of the Angels who follow him — we therefore reject, as a Pelagian fable, any intermediate place in which to put Infants who die with only the guilt of original sin.

IV. But if all Men are born spiritually dead in the first Adam, and enemies of God, and worthy of eternal damnation, in the second Adam — who is Jesus Christ, made a propitiatory victim for the sins of the whole World — they are brought to life, and, being reborn in Him and through Him, are admitted to the perfect adoption of children of God, and become His heirs, and co-heirs with Jesus Christ.

V. This spiritual rebirth is brought about precisely through the Sacrament of Baptism, called for this reason the *Sacrament of regeneration through water in the word*. Hence whoever remains without it, lacking the character of an adopted child of God, which is indelibly imprinted on the soul of whoever is baptized, can have no part in the inheritance of the

Kingdom of Heaven: he does not belong to the Body of Jesus Christ, which is the Holy Church, is incapable of any other Sacrament, and does not share in the Communion of Saints. From these things it follows that Baptism is the first and most necessary of all the Sacraments.

VI. The Catholic Church teaches, however, that those who die in confessing Jesus Christ without being able to receive this Sacrament remain spiritually washed in their own blood; and it is likewise the teaching of this same Mother and Teacher of ours that, in adults, in a case of absolute necessity, the lack of the Sacrament of Baptism may be supplied by the desire for it, accompanied by a living faith in Jesus, our one Mediator, and by a perfect contrition for actual sins, arising from a most ardent charity.

VII. Considering the utmost necessity of Baptism, one can understand how grave is the fault of those parents, etc., who, in order to allow room for some worldly display precisely in the act of bringing their children to Church — turning the whole thing into a solemn occasion — delay their baptism by several days. The holy Synod therefore wills that Parish priests be watchful that Baptism be administered to newborns within 24 hours, when this can be done; and, while commending that on the occasion of a Baptism the parents, relatives, and friends rejoice and be glad in the Lord, reflecting that through it one of their dearest ones is snatched from the power of darkness, it disapproves and condemns, in the so-called celebratory banquets, everything that reeks of luxury, self-interest, dissipation, and excess.

VIII. And to remove every pretext for delay, and to restore to Parish priests one of their proper hierarchical functions, every Parish shall have its own Baptistery, and it shall be lawful to administer Baptism only there, in keeping with the sacred Canons, and particularly with the Decree of the General Council of Vienne, which, apart from the case of a child in danger of death, exempts from this rule only the children of Princes.

IX. It having pleased the Father of mercies that, for so necessary a Sacrament, since its element — natural water — is so common, anyone might be its Minister in a case of danger of death, it will be the Parish priests' task to instruct all their people both in the parts constituting the Sacrament and in the order to be observed, according to the sacred Canons, among persons of different sex and standing who might be present in such a case; as well as in the obligation to bring the child to the Church, once the danger has passed, to complete the other ceremonies which, though not essential to the Sacrament, are nevertheless seen to have been prescribed and religiously practiced since the earliest centuries. They shall also see to it diligently that the quantity of water be such that the act represents a washing either of the head, or, failing that, of another notable part of the child that appears outside the mother's womb, and not a mere light sprinkling — referring us, on this point, to the instructions of the Roman Ritual.

X. Midwives frequently find themselves in the position of administering this Sacrament. His Royal Highness must therefore be petitioned to make general the Law which provides that no one be admitted to the profession of Midwife who does not show, by a certificate from her own Parish priest, that she is well informed of the matters contained in the preceding article. It will

also be the Parish priests' duty to warn them that infants are sometimes born only apparently dead, and that, therefore, whenever they do not observe clear signs of decomposition, they are obliged to use some diligence with such infants, so as, if possible, to preserve a citizen for the state, and, through Baptism, a child for Holy Church.

XI. Although Baptism is so necessary for eternal salvation, as has been said, nonetheless Holy Church, most devoted to good public order and the enemy of all violence, absolutely forbids baptizing either children born of Jews and Infidels without the consent of their parents, or adults against their will and without allowing the trials of which we shall speak.

XII. Not even under the pretext of the aforesaid necessity is it permitted to baptize those who, born of Christian parents, have always lived as Christians in a Christian country, even though no record of their Baptism can be found — since, on the one hand, it must be presumed that they received it, until the contrary is evidently established, and, on the other, the repetition of Sacraments that imprint a character is a sacrilege. But should a reasonable doubt arise as to whether someone has been baptized, or validly baptized, we shall not hesitate to hold to the ancient Canons, which, without mentioning any conditional formula, established that what is reasonably doubted to have been done should not be considered to require repetition.

XIII. It is, then, a matter of the utmost importance that Parish priests keep a register of the baptized, which they shall keep with the greatest exactness, presenting a copy of it annually to the Chancelleries, according to the standing orders. Nor should it ever happen again, as it has in past times, to the grave harm of the most wretched and to the disgrace of our holy ministry, that anyone in need be refused a certificate of his birth — since we are bound to provide such certificates freely, and out of mere charity.

XIV. It is of faith that the spiritual rebirth wrought by holy Baptism is equally perfect both in children and in adults who receive it with the due dispositions; nor would it be so, in the case of the latter, if it did not fully remit, besides original sin, their actual sins and all the punishment merited by them, and did not fill the soul with those graces that mark the passage of one who, from being a member of Satan, becomes a living member of Jesus Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit.

XV. Among the dispositions required of adults for the worthy reception of Baptism, two are the principal ones: faith, without which it is impossible to please God, and sorrow for actual sins, arising from a principle of love of God above all else, considered as the source of all righteousness and holiness.

XVI. For this reason, whenever an adult presents himself to be baptized, the Parish priests shall take care to inform the Bishop; and, having obtained his permission, they shall admit him to the Catechumenate, instructing him exactly in the principal articles of the faith and in the precepts of the Gospel and of the Church; and, once they are assured of the Catechumen's capacity and of the sincerity of his conversion, with the Bishop's prior permission, they shall admit him to Baptism on the prescribed days, having him keep the white garment for the

whole octave — a period the Church still regards, precisely on account of the Newly Baptized, as a time of rejoicing.

XVII. If, then, through Baptism man becomes a new creature, a member of the household of the faith and of God, a Citizen of the Saints, and a living member of Jesus Christ, and if there can be no fellowship between light and darkness, between Christ and the Devil, the world and its basest desires, the Holy Spirit and the flesh — how great, then, must be the care of the sacred Pastors, so that the faithful People may fully understand the dignity of their profession, and the most grave obligations contracted in that washing of life?

XVIII. Since the solemn ceremonies that precede and accompany the essential washing in Baptism are intended to give a right understanding of both, and since instruction given upon a present object proves most effective, for this reason — and also out of a proper regard for the venerable Discipline of Apostolic times — it would seem fitting that not only the Catechumens, should there be any, but also all those born after the Thursday preceding Holy Saturday and Pentecost, be brought, in the Urban Parishes, to be baptized at the Baptistery of the Cathedral after the blessing of the Font, and that on this occasion the Parish priest explain these ceremonies to those present, not failing to point out that the holy Fathers — especially the great Augustine — made use of them as most powerful weapons in triumphing over heresy. This explanation should be given briefly and clearly, whenever, in the course of the year, a considerable gathering of people is seen at the administration of Baptism. Those baptized at the Cathedral shall be recorded both in the register of the Cathedral and in that of their own Parish, indicating the place where Baptism was received.

XIX. In Rural Parishes, each Parish priest shall perform the ceremony at his own Baptistery, in his own Church.

XX. Mention is found, as far back as the time of Tertullian, of persons appointed to present Catechumens or children at the sacred Font in the name of Holy Church, and to stand as guarantors of their faith and of the fulfillment of the obligations attached to being a Christian. The holy Synod, approving this most ancient custom, wills, however, that all persons be excluded from the office of Godparent who, whether by age — as in the case of those not yet of age — are unfit for it; or, by their profession — as in the case of Ecclesiastics, both Regular and Secular — cannot hold it; or, by ignorance or by a scandalous life — as in the case of public sinners — are incapable and unworthy of guiding the spiritual children of Christian piety.

XXI. We further deem it right to follow the spirit of Holy Church herself, as represented by the general Council of Trent, by prescribing that males have only a Godfather, and females only a Godmother; and it would not be out of keeping with the pure discipline of antiquity to determine that Godparents be chosen from among the closest relatives of the parents.

XXII. It is likewise the custom to give newborns a name at holy Baptism, not only so that each may be distinguished within civil society, but also so that every believer may have, in the one whose name he bears, a model of Christian virtue to imitate.

XXIII. And for this reason, the holy Synod, generally regarding the multiplication of names in private individuals as an abuse, determines that at least each person's first and principal name should not be profane, ridiculous, or indecent, but rather that of a Saint canonized by the Church.

XXIV. As for the purification after childbirth: although by the grace of Jesus Christ we are freed from the yoke of Jewish ceremonies, still, if women who have given birth present themselves at the Church, in imitation of Mary ever Virgin, to receive the customary blessing from the Parish priest, he shall give it. Let him, however, remain watchful, lest some superstition or error take root in women's minds on this account.

Decree on Confirmation — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XVII Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session IV, pages 117–122, between the Decree on Baptism and the Decree on the Eucharist. It grounds Confirmation in Acts 8 (Peter and John laying hands on the Samaritan converts), affirms it as a true and distinct Sacrament of the New Covenant — not a mere ceremony attached to Baptism — reserved to Bishops, consisting of the laying on of hands with prayer, and accompanied by anointing with sacred Chrism. It then works out the practical question of the age of Confirmation, favoring deferral to the age of reason (following St. Charles Borromeo) over the ancient practice of confirming infants, and closes with pastoral instructions on preparing candidates and parish priests' duty to see that no one neglects the sacrament.*

I. Knowing how great is the weakness and infirmity of man after the fall of Adam, should He not sustain him by His Grace in all his actions and in all the dangers to which he may be exposed, and foreseeing, moreover, that, since man was to live on this earth among enemies of His holy name and of His teachings, these would not fail to induce him to renounce Him and His Gospel, Jesus Christ our Redeemer willed, by an effect of that same infinite mercy by which He had instituted the Sacrament of Baptism, to leave him also a means by which he might maintain and strengthen himself in that same faith against every effort the Devils, the World, and the flesh might make to induce him to abandon it.

II. We confess this means to be that Sacrament which the Fathers generally call the perfection and completion of Baptism, and which is now commonly called the Sacrament of Confirmation, because, by increasing grace — that is, charity — in us, it likewise increases the strength of our soul, and makes us firmer in the faith of Jesus Christ already received, and consequently readier to fight, and better able to overcome the attempts made by the aforesaid enemies to induce us to renounce it.

III. We hold the institution of this means — which we believe to be not a mere ceremony attached to Baptism, but a true and properly so-called Sacrament of the new Covenant, distinct from Baptism — to be expressed in various places in the New Testament, most clearly, however, in Chapter 8 of the Acts of the Apostles, where we read that, the Apostles then residing in Jerusalem having heard how many Samaritans had received the Gospel preached to them by Philip, and had already been baptized by this Deacon, they sent Peter and John there, who, having prayed and laid hands upon those newly baptized, thereby conferred upon them the Holy Spirit.

IV. By this name of the Holy Spirit we do not mean, as the false Reformers claim, only outward graces — that is, the gift of foretelling the future, that of speaking in various tongues without having previously studied them, and all the other gifts numbered by St. Paul in Chapter 12 of his first letter to the Corinthians — but we believe it to denote principally an interior grace, a grace of light and of will, which increasingly heals and strengthens us. For, on the one hand, the Holy Scriptures attest that as soon as the Apostles had received the Holy Spirit, they not only found themselves endowed with the aforesaid outward gifts, but also that, from being timid and fearful in confessing Jesus Christ as they had been before, they at once became the strongest and most fearless proclaimers of His name and His Gospel; and, on the other hand, St. Cyprian, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, etc. — in whose times these outward graces once received by the Faithful in the laying on of hands had already ceased — teach us that, through this same imposition of hands performed by themselves and by all the other Bishops, the Holy Spirit continued to be conferred upon the Faithful.

V. Relying on this same Chapter 8 of the Acts of the Apostles, we say that the parts constituting the Sacrament of Confirmation — that is, the sensible rite instituted by Jesus Christ to communicate to us the grace we need in order to withstand the enemies of His holy name — are the laying on of hands, and the prayer joined to it

VI. The anointing with sacred Chrism, which we see practiced as far back as the time of Tertullian, we judge must absolutely be retained, as most fitting to signify to the faithful the interior anointing that takes place in our soul through the grace conferred by the laying on of hands joined with prayer, and the strength that this grace furnishes to our will, so that it may withstand whatever hardship and misfortune for the love of Jesus Christ.

VII. Likewise, since the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, wherever they speak of Confirmation, constantly present the Apostles as the Ministers of this Sacrament, and since it cannot otherwise be doubted that all the Apostles were made Bishops by Jesus Christ, we are persuaded that it is certainly for the Bishops to administer Confirmation.

VIII. The Sacrament of Confirmation being, as we said above, the perfection and completion of Baptism (since, if through Baptism we simply give our name, or are enrolled in the sacred militia of Jesus Christ our Head, Confirmation furnishes us with the spiritual weapons to fight, under Jesus Christ Himself, against our enemies and His), it is a clear and manifest thing that only one who has received Baptism can be capable of Confirmation.

IX. In the first three centuries of the Church, in which persecutions against Christians were frequent, Bishops were obliged to confer this Sacrament even on children just baptized, so that they might be equipped with the strength it furnished against the enemies of the Christian name, even though they had not yet reached the use of reason.

This custom continued for some time even after peace was restored to the Church; but afterward, in the Latin Church, it began to be considered that the faithful would derive all the greater benefit, the greater their understanding and their actual dispositions were in receiving this Sacrament. Various circumstances caused a periodic return to the practice of the first

three centuries, and Confirmation continued to be administered even to tender infants, although the same reasoning no longer applied. There were, however, certain restorers of Ecclesiastical Discipline — among them St. Charles [Borromeo] — who made it understood how much more fitting it would be not to admit to this Sacrament any but those who had the use of reason, considering the greater spiritual benefit that could be derived from receiving it with understanding.

X. It therefore seems to us fitting that the baptized not be admitted to Confirmation before reaching the use of reason, except in particular cases — above all, that in which a child should be dangerously ill; for it must then be considered that, should this infant die without the grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation, he would, in the next life, be deprived of a degree of glory that necessarily corresponds to that Grace.

XI. Although we are persuaded that one can attain eternal life even without having received this Sacrament, since one can be righteous even without it, we nevertheless reject the view of those who believe there is no precept, either divine or ecclesiastical, binding adults to desire and receive it. We therefore say that, by virtue of both divine and ecclesiastical law, every adult is bound, at any time, to seek to be confirmed; that this obligation increases when the Bishop is nearby and prepared to administer Confirmation to others; and that one is bound even more strictly should he find himself dangerously ill, or should some persecution against Christians arise.

XII. It cannot be doubted that fathers or mothers, guardians, and masters are bound to remind and urge those under their care to receive Confirmation, should the latter show themselves negligent in this. The three-year penance to which parents were subjected who, through carelessness, had let their children die without this Sacrament, is a most convincing proof of this. The Parish priest shall remind them of this duty of theirs.

XIII. More than anyone else, however, the Parish priest himself is bound to exhort and urge those of his Parishioners whom he recognizes as negligent in this matter, setting before them the canonical penalties established by the Council of Reims against Christians who take no care of it, the spiritual advantages of which they thereby voluntarily deprive themselves, and the danger to which those expose their souls who, surrounded as they are by so many enemies, neglect to receive, through Confirmation, the strength that serves to repel their assaults. The Parish priest will therefore not fail to instruct his People often on this subject, and will neglect nothing to ensure that they are always disposed to be confirmed; but his diligence must redouble once the Bishop has fixed a day to come to his Parish, or its vicinity, to administer Confirmation.

XIV. In such circumstances, Parish Instructions must be more frequent, touching on everything a Christian must necessarily know, insisting especially on what directly concerns this Sacrament, setting forth its nature and power in a manner easy and suited to the capacity of all, and noting that, besides the grace of the Holy Spirit — which is communicated, with all the gifts of that same divine Spirit, to our soul, and strengthens it against all temptations, both

internal and external — it likewise imprints on the soul, as Baptism does, the character, or spiritual sign, which cannot be erased, and which ensures that this Sacrament cannot be received more than once. Finally, he will not fail to explain the meaning of the sacred ceremonies practiced in its administration.

XV. Above all else, however, he will dwell on the dispositions necessary for approaching it worthily. He will accordingly point out that, since Confirmation is instituted to make us firmer in the profession of the Faith and Law of Jesus Christ, and to increase and perfect charity in us, it therefore necessarily presupposes the life of the soul in the one who receives it. If, then, there should be among his Parishioners any who had not, up to that time, preserved their baptismal innocence, he will take care, in good time, to dispose them to receive the Sacrament of Penance, so as to regain righteousness.

XVI. As such a day approaches, it will be the Parish priest's precise duty to notify and exhort those to be confirmed to multiply their prayers, and to prepare themselves, at least on the day immediately preceding that of Confirmation, with fasting for those capable of it, and with some abstinence for the others, following the example of the Apostles, who, while awaiting the Holy Spirit, persevered in prayer and fasting.

XVII. Once the sacred ceremony is concluded, the Parish priest will urge those Confirmed to devote themselves, for seven consecutive days, in a special manner to works of piety and to thanksgiving to God for the heavenly gifts conferred on them in this Sacrament, and to note and celebrate every year, with the same special observances of piety and Christian charity, the day on which they were made partakers of these graces.

Decree on the Eucharist — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

VIII Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session IV, pages 123–133, the final and longest decree of the session, following those on the Sacraments in General, Baptism, and Confirmation. It covers, in order: the institution narrative and the matter and form of the sacrament; the Real Presence and transubstantiation; the cult of adoration and Eucharistic exposition; the sacrificial nature of the Mass and its identity with the sacrifice of the Cross; a long set of practical liturgical rules (the Canon of the Mass, ceremonies, organ and church music, church ornamentation, altars); the famous passage on liturgical reform (Article VI); the dispositions needed to receive Communion (Article VII); and, finally, the purpose of the sacrifice, the distribution of its fruits, and the abolition of Mass stipends tied to a specific priest's celebration (Article VIII).*

I. Since man can have no religion toward his God, nor, of himself, life and salvation, except in Him who, established as the Angel of the new covenant, is in it the eternal High Priest, and the author and finisher of our salvation, it was, according to the counsels of His omnipotent Father, that He should continue His dwelling among men until the consummation of the Saints, so that they might live by His life by uniting themselves to Him, and that this should be done by means of a sensible rite, as their nature requires. This was accomplished in the institution of the Eucharist. Our Lord, at the Last Supper, took bread, and, giving thanks to His Father, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the Apostles, saying: Take and eat, this is my Body, which is given for you. Then, taking the Chalice, giving thanks again to the Father, He blessed it, and gave it, saying: Drink, this is my Blood, which is poured out for you and for many. Finally, turning to the Apostles themselves, whom He was then establishing as Priests of the new covenant, He commanded them and their successors in the Priesthood to continue this action, saying: Do this in memory of me.

On these words, this holy Council, gathered in the name of the Holy Spirit, sets forth the Catholic Faith concerning the nature of the rite of the Eucharist. And first it declares that it believes, with the universal Church, that its elements are wheat bread and wine pressed from the fruit of the vine. As to the bread, although it does not condemn the Eastern Church for using it leavened, it wills, however, that the custom of the Western Church of using it unleavened be retained; and it likewise embraces the common custom regarding the quantity and shape of the bread itself.

Resting, moreover, on Apostolic Tradition, confirmed by the Canons and by the practice of the Church, it believes that a very small quantity of water must be mixed with the wine, and approves, as fit to edify the spirit, reflection on the mystical meaning our liturgy assigns to

this union, following certain Fathers. It holds, however, that the wine is validly consecrated even without the water, and therefore, following the practice of the Western Church, wills that the Priest not add it to the chalice once he has completed the rite of consecration on the wine alone.

The Synod further declares the rite performed on these elements to be null when they are so altered that they are stripped of their natural qualities; and it condemns as guilty of sin those who should use elements imperfect in their proper qualities.

As to the rite of consecration, we believe that it is accomplished by the repetition of the action and the words of Jesus Christ; and, in keeping with the arrangement of our liturgy, we hold the consecration to be completed as soon as the Lord's words have been pronounced.

Finally, as to the Ministers, we believe these to be those to whom it was said: Do this in memory of me — that is, the Apostles and their successors in the Priesthood, Bishops or simple Priests established as such by sacred ordination; and we renew the condemnation pronounced by our Fathers and by the Church against the heresies that have arisen against these truths.

II. Concerning the power of this rite, we believe it belongs to the Catholic Faith that, after the consecration of the bread and wine, Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things, and we condemn, with the Church, those who say He is contained there only as a sign, a figure, or a power.

We further believe, as belonging to the same faith, that the whole substance of the bread and wine then ceases, only the appearances remaining, and that the whole of Jesus Christ is contained in this Sacrament under each species, and under any part of each species after it has been divided; and we condemn as contrary to the faith the opinion of those who hold that the substance of the elements remains there together with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

As for the scholastic questions concerning the manner in which Jesus Christ is present under the species, the character of the species themselves, and other such matters, it seems fitting to the Synod that Parish priests, following the style and teaching of the Fathers, not occupy themselves with these, nor discuss them, but rather hold and teach these mysteries with simplicity, striving to animate and enkindle in the people a firm faith in them by explaining the omnipotence of God's love toward mankind.

On the other hand, it charges them to take the utmost care to remove from the minds of the faithful any base or overly material idea of this mystery, by instructing them that the Body of Christ is not an animal body, but a spiritual and life-giving one, and that it exists in the Eucharist not in the manner natural to other bodies, but in a supernatural and spiritual manner which, though we cannot express it in words, we nonetheless come to understand, by a thought enlightened by faith, to be possible to God.

From the Articles established thus far it follows, first, that the Eucharist is a Sacrament, since it contains Jesus Christ, who is for us grace, life, and salvation, and contains Him under an

outward sign — namely, under the species of bread and wine, which represent the food and spiritual banquet of the soul. Secondly, that this is unique to the Eucharist: that whereas the other Sacraments have the power to sanctify only in their use, in this one the very author of holiness is present even outside its use; for we believe, with the Church, that after the consecration Jesus Christ is in it both before and after its use, and in the particles reserved after communion, so long as the species are not altogether altered and corrupted. And we renew the condemnation of the contrary sentiments of the Heterodox on these truths.

As for the reservation of the Eucharist, we are pleased to renew the ancient Canons which determined that only as many particles be reserved as may be necessary for the use of the sick, and for cases of grave necessity.

III. From our understanding of the nature of this Sacrament, we know and confess that the worship of Latria [adoration due to God alone] must be rendered to Christ, who is contained in it. And since the Church, to express this worship, introduced some centuries ago the custom of solemn exposition, and of carrying it in public processions on the Feast of Corpus Christi, we embrace this custom as pious and religious, and confess the motives for its institution to be just and holy.

Considering that the piety and fervor of the Faithful, and their veneration for this Sacrament, would be better served by restoring the practice of exposing it solemnly in the Monstrance and carrying it in public procession only during the octave of that Feast, the Synod is pleased to restore this, retaining, only in the Cathedral Church, the custom of exposing it once a month; and it decrees that, on Sundays and other solemn Feasts, the people gather only to adore it, without removing it from the place where it resides, and that the Parish priest close this act of adoration with a blessing given with the closed Pyx.

As to the manner to be followed in these observances, we adopt as synodal laws the arrangements already made and introduced, desiring only that the Litanies of the Saints be replaced by those of the Lord.

IV. Having set forth the Catholic faith concerning the nature of the sacramental rite of the Eucharist, the real presence of Jesus Christ, and the worship due to it, we shall now declare the sublime character of that action by which these Mysteries were instituted by Christ, and are then repeated by the Church. And first we declare, with the Catholic Church, that this very action is a true sacrifice — that sacrifice which was prefigured by various sacrificial types under the law of nature, and under that given to the Israelites, as being that which embraces all the goods those sacrifices signified, being their consummation and perfection, and consequently that sacrifice by which not only is due honor, praise, blessing, and fitting thanks rendered to the Divinity for the mercies He shows the children of men, but in which there is also the true remission of sins and satisfaction for the debts contracted against divine Justice; and we renew the anathemas hurled by the Church against the errors of the Heterodox contrary to these truths.

Examining, then, the nature of this sacrifice, we declare it not to be separate or different in its essence from that of the Cross, since the same victim is offered in it by the same Priest, namely Jesus Christ; and although it contains all the parts essential to a true sacrifice of oblation, and to a true and real immolation, it is not distinguished from that of the Cross except in the manner in which it is offered, which is without the shedding of blood. We therefore confess that no injury is thereby done to the sacrifice of the Cross, since the difference of manner, far from destroying the unity of the sacrifice of the new covenant, sustains it, since it is precisely through this manner that the same victim is sacrificed. And indeed, if Jesus Christ, after His Resurrection, has put on incorruptibility and dies no more, it was fitting either that the sacrifice should cease — which cannot be offered without an actual victim — or that an immolation be established which should in some manner depend on that of the Cross, and yet be distinct from it; and since this kind of immolation surpasses our understanding, we profess a sincere submission of our faith to so great a mystery, and we recognize that Jesus Christ removed every difficulty to this faith in instituting the Eucharist. He was alive, and yet He performed the sacrifice of His death, and confirmed with His Blood that covenant which He had not yet sealed with that same death.

Since, moreover, the founder of our Religion taught us that true worshippers adore God in spirit and in truth, we believe that the sacrifice of the Eucharist is, as to its nature, spiritual; and whatever is visible or external in it we regard, with St. Augustine, as the sign and Sacrament of the true and invisible sacrifice; we believe, that is, that in it there is consumed not a carnal, but a spiritual and incorruptible victim — namely, the Body of Jesus Christ — by the fire of the Holy Spirit's charity, by which the Father sanctified it; and that Jesus Christ is the true Priest, who offers Himself to the Father. From this perennial sacrifice flows to us the abundance of heavenly graces and blessings.

V. We venerate, moreover, the Sacrament of this sacrifice, both because it is established by God and because it suits our nature. For although the new law, unlike the Jewish law, contains the spirit and the truth, still, until the edifice built upon Jesus Christ has grown into the perfect temple of God, and we are not stripped of mortality, we have these things under symbols and enigmas, nor can we yet see them face to face. Besides this, we recognize the value of this Sacrament for the obligation Christians have to unite themselves with that victim in the action of the sacrifice; for we believe that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is joined to that of the whole redeemed City, which enters, with its Head, into the Holy Temple of God in a state of Holocaust; and we confess, with the Fathers, that this is done essentially in the sacrifice of the Altar through the union of the Faithful with this victim, which is brought about by means of the sign of the visible rite.

As for this outward rite, we accept, in the first place, the Canon of the Mass, introduced many centuries ago, recognizing it as expressing all the parts of a true sacrifice, as pure of every error, and as containing nothing that does not breathe holiness and piety; and with it we accept the other ordinary parts of the present Liturgy.

The Synod further wills that Priests observe diligently all the prescribed ceremonies and rites; that they pronounce all the words distinctly and devoutly; and that they neither hasten the action nor use a delay excessive and inconvenient to those present.

As for the sound of organs, it seems fitting to the Synod to establish that they be silent during Mass from the Offertory to the Postcommunion, except during the Preface.

As for church music and singing, the Synod confirms that this, according to the mind of the Fathers, was introduced to instill more deeply in the spirit of the faithful sentiments of religion, and to kindle the various feelings of piety expressed in it; and, reflecting that, to serve this end, music must be simple, grave, modest, pious, and suited to the sense of the words, it forbids music lacking these qualities.

Although the nature of our sacrifice requires no particular place in preference to those of the old law, our Fathers rightly willed that it be offered, cases of necessity excepted, in places set apart for it, persuaded that the mysteries are handled there with greater decency, and that the Faithful, by the example of others who gather there, by the order of things and by the setting, are moved to veneration and piety. To achieve this end, they removed from the Churches everything that could hinder devotion, such as profane business transactions, secular gatherings, idle talk, walking about, and noise. We approve such decrees, and, since the poor, wandering about in Churches, tend to disturb the prayer of the Faithful, we think it fitting to see that they be prevented from begging within them.

As for the ornamentation of the Churches themselves, the Synod is pleased to retain the rule of St. Augustine — that in matters of religion such use should be made of human things *that we are not offended by the lower, but delighted only by the higher*. We accordingly determine that disorder, squalor, and a rusticity provoking laughter — which, offending the senses, distracts the spirit from devotion — must be avoided, as must ornamentation that is too varied, too costly, or too affected, since this too allures the senses and draws the soul into delight in lesser things. These abuses were condemned by the Fathers, whose sentiments have been conveyed to our own times by the Archbishop of Salzburg in a religious instruction, which we embrace on this point.

Coming, then, to deliberate on the Altars of the Churches, the holy Synod thinks it fitting to establish the following Decrees.

Since the order of the Divine Offices, and the ancient custom of the Church, suggest it fitting that each Temple have but a single Altar, the Synod is pleased to restore this custom.

Reliquaries or flowers are not to be placed on the Altars, and, should any Church possess authentic Relics, these are to be exposed to the veneration of the People beneath the Altar, according to the custom of antiquity.

The Synod, wishing the Sacrament to be kept in a place better suited to arouse the attention and reverence of the Faithful, wills that the ancient custom of erecting Tabernacles [Ciboria]

on high be restored, and that the Sacrament be kept in them; and that, in the place where the Sacrament is reserved, there be no painting that is not appropriate to it.

VI. If religion consists in Sacrifice, and if there is but one Sacrifice in the new covenant, it must be admitted that the faithful, too, have a part in it.

Hence we embrace the custom and the Apostolic law of taking part in the Sacrifice on Sundays and on the feast days appointed by the Church; and since the Canons that prescribe this to the faithful speak of the Parish Mass, we ratify the ancient laws on this point, and consequently we adopt the arrangements proposed by the Bishop in the instruction on the establishment of the new Parishes of Prato; likewise, with regard to the public rural Oratories, we wish these to be done away with entirely wherever they are not found necessary for the good of the people; where they are indeed necessary, we desire that they be raised to Parishes, and that in the meantime a Chaplain carry out there the parish functions of instruction and Catechism. We leave it to the Bishop's prudence to decide on the private rural Oratories.

When we say that the faithful have a part in the sacrifice, we mean that they offer and immolate the victim together with the Priest, and offer themselves along with it. And since the whole Liturgy contains nothing but these parts of the Sacrifice, together with the rule of the actions by which these parts are to be accompanied, it follows that, according to the teaching of the Fathers, the practice of antiquity, and the very order and tenor of all the Liturgies, the Liturgy is an action common to the Priest and to the People.

Persuaded of these principles, the holy Synod would wish that the reasons be removed on account of which these truths have in part fallen into oblivion, by restoring the Liturgy to a greater simplicity of rites, by setting it forth in the vernacular tongue, and by having it pronounced in a raised voice. But since circumstances do not allow it to satisfy these desires of its own, it confines itself to renewing the law of the Council of Trent, which prescribes that Pastors, in every instruction they give on feast days and during the time of Mass, explain some part of the Liturgy; and it urges them to introduce among the People books containing the Ordinary of the Mass in the vernacular tongue, and to encourage those who can read to follow the Priest by this means.

Since, moreover, an essential part of the sacrifice is participation in the victim, the holy Synod would wish that the faithful, whenever they attend, should communicate.

It does not, however, condemn as unlawful those Masses at which those present do not communicate sacramentally, since they do participate — albeit less perfectly — in this victim by receiving it in spirit. It wills, nevertheless, that whenever anyone is disposed to communicate — except in cases of grave necessity — he communicate at that Mass with hosts consecrated at it; and it accordingly enjoins the Priests that, whenever they foresee that someone disposed to communicate will attend Mass, they consecrate a suitable number of hosts, and, in keeping with the rule of the Roman Missal, give communion after they themselves have communicated; and it warns them that they would be guilty of sin if, when a

member of the faithful wished to communicate at Mass, they failed to accommodate this right and deprived him of the particular fruit that comes from Liturgical communion.

VII. It remains, finally, that we determine the manner in which this Sacrament is to be received; in which matter we shall begin by professing, with the Holy Fathers, that Eucharistic eating is not a carnal eating, as the Capernaites believed. If this food is spiritual, if it nourishes the life of the spirit, then the very manner of partaking of it must also be spiritual; and consequently those whose spirit is not disposed to receive it, even though they press the Sacrament with their teeth and receive the Body of Jesus Christ within themselves, do not thereby feed on it fruitfully.

Coming, then, to the spiritual dispositions required, we determine that each person, besides being so instructed in the Faith as to know how to discern the Body of the Lord, must be free from sin, since holy things must be treated in a holy manner, and the Apostle warns us that *he who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself*. For this reason, no one — not even a Priest conscious in himself of mortal sin — should approach this table before having tested himself according to the rules to be prescribed in the Treatise on Penance.

VIII. Finally, coming to examine the purpose for which the Sacrifice is to be offered, the holy Council professes that this action belongs to the worship of Latria; and therefore, although it is sometimes said to be offered in honor of the Saints, it declares that it is not offered *to* them, but to God *in memory* of them — that is, to thank God for their victories, to ask Him to make them our intercessors, and to unite ourselves with them in acts of praise and prayer toward Him.

Since, moreover, the same victim is offered in the Sacrifice that was offered for all upon the Cross, we believe our offering extends to all — that is, to those outside the Church, and to all true believers living on earth, as well as to those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, and sleep in the sleep of peace.

Besides this general offering, we believe, moreover, that special commemoration may be made in the liturgy of certain persons, whether living or dead, praying to God for them in a particular way — not, however, that we believe it lies within the Priest's discretion to apply the fruits of the Sacrifice to whomever he wishes; indeed, we condemn this error as a grave offense against the rights of God, who alone distributes the fruits of the Sacrifice to whom He wills, and in the measure that pleases Him.

And since the false opinion has taken hold among the people that those who give a Priest an offering on the condition that he celebrate a Mass thereby receive a special fruit from the Sacrifice, the Synod commands the Parish priests to teach their flock that the Sacrifice of the Mass is of infinite value, but that the application of its fruits depends on God, and that the way to share in it most fully is to unite oneself, with firm faith and a penitent spirit enkindled with charity, to the Priest in offering it; that they will have the merit of the offering only when it is made in a spirit of charity, since God regards not the gift, but the piety of the giver.

Finally, as to the very practice of such offerings, the Synod, considering that it has, since the time it was introduced, been an obstacle to the disinterestedness required of Priests in the dispensing of God's mysteries, to the scandal of the Faithful and the profanation of holy things; and seeing that the Constitutions of Councils, Roman Pontiffs, and Bishops, renewed so many times, have not been sufficient to prevent such abuses, has judged it fitting to abolish it, likewise adhering to the religious views of the Royal Sovereign expressed in the Circular of 26 January 1786 — with the declaration, however, that this is not to be carried out with regard to needy Priests, until the Bishop has provided them with an honest means of support.

Session V — 25 September 1786

Decree on Penance — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XV Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session V, pages 141–151, immediately preceding the sections on Indulgences, Reserved Cases, Excommunications, and Suspension, and following the Decree on the Eucharist from Session IV. This decree lays out the Synod's theology of the sacrament of Penance — the history of its decline, the necessity of interior charity/contrition, the nature of absolution, what must be confessed, and the required form (words plus imposition of hands) — and explicitly rejects the "conditional form" of absolution used by some contemporaries.*

I. The Sacrament of Penance, which the Fathers commonly called the second plank after shipwreck, ought above all others to draw our care and attention. It is of the utmost importance that Pastors, no less than the Faithful, form a right idea of it, so that it may be administered with exactness and received with fruit. The neglect of the sources from which such rightness could have been drawn is the disastrous origin of the many abuses and disorders that still reign in so august a Sacrament, on account of which — as the Roman Pontiffs and holy Pastors have so often lamented — we see a great multitude of professed penitents, and almost no conversion. One cannot recall without emotion and without tears the happy days of the Church, in which to present oneself to receive it was the same as renouncing the pleasures of the world, declaring continual war on one's own inclinations, and entering upon a humbling and mortified way of life, persevering in it with fervor for very long periods. But those days have passed, and we can say in truth that of penance nothing remains to us but the name; and if the Sacrament has remained in its original power — since its inward efficacy does not depend on man — it is most often useless, and even harmful, because administered poorly and received without the proper dispositions.

II. But whence did such disorder arise? It is not our intention to enter into a minute account of the stages by which it came to such degradation. Pope Alexander VII, as has been noted above, recognized the fault for it in large part in that unbridled excess of rash men who, swollen with a profane loquacity and subtlety called scholastic, and carried away by an intemperate desire to flatter men's passions, departed from the pure springs of Scripture and the Fathers, and sought to make their own human notions dominate in the schools and, still more, in the Churches. When a crowd of unauthorized, itinerant ministers, in defiance of the legitimate Pastors, intruded into the ministry of the Sacraments, and wandered about offering reconciliation to persons ill-known and undisciplined; when the prevailing enthusiasm of a

barbarous Philosophy had spoiled and corrupted the clear and precise idea of this Sacrament, and what once took a great deal of time became a matter of a moment or half an hour, one cannot fail to see to what extremes the administration of this Sacrament was bound to be reduced. On the one hand, sinners — who in those unlettered centuries were many — felt a repugnance at entering upon the humbling path of penance; on the other, the self-interest of these itinerant ministers required that everything be administered in haste, and therefore without ascertaining the penitent's dispositions for receiving it. The unfortunate studies that had begun to dominate not only the profane sciences but the schools of Religion, through a proliferation of technical terms and subtleties, made Faith and the Sacraments — in a way unknown to our Fathers — slaves to certain ridiculous rules and formalities; and, substituting new ideas for the old, disputation no longer turned on the dispositions and the conversion of the heart, but on the "matter," the "form," and the numbering and classification of sins.

III. But rash men did not stop here. However confused the ideas that had been introduced, it was still taught that divine love ought to be the foundation and basis of this Sacrament; and if, owing to the frivolity of the times and the pettiness of these reasoners, this dominant love came to be called the "matter" of the Sacrament, it nevertheless continued to be taught that it was of precise necessity in order to receive it worthily. But who can adequately foresee the abyss into which a man imperceptibly falls once he has broken through the first barriers and abandoned himself to himself? They found the necessity of loving God in order to be reconciled with Him too burdensome, and introduced I know not what fear of punishment which, though it cannot be called bad if it at least restrains the hands, still cannot be sufficient, since it does not go so far as to change the heart. They said even more, and held it to be a privilege of the law of charity and love that one could be reconciled with God without loving Him. One would have to be either senseless or wicked not to feel the horror of this capricious impiety; and yet it is most certain that the Church's thunders and the abhorrence of pious Believers have still not managed to heal so shameful a wound perfectly. The traces of this scandalous doctrine still exist — and we recall this with the deepest sorrow — and the not few very bad books that taught it still sometimes resurface, through the work of corrupt and undisciplined men. The holy Synod, therefore, abhorring such disorders, and wishing, so far as the circumstances of the times allow, to restore so necessary a Sacrament to its ancient fervor, exhorts the Pastors with the greatest urgency to apply themselves seriously to instructing the Faithful concerning its nature, its dispositions, and its effects.

IV. Man, the noblest of all creatures upon this earth, could not have been created except for the glory of his God. This sovereign Benefactor was to be his center and his end, toward which, by an intrinsic obligation, he should continually tend, and to which he should direct his powers and his actions. This happy tendency and this impulse which the Lord impressed upon him was constantly called by the Fathers a love of charity. If he fell through original sin, and — turning away from God, to whom he ought always to have directed himself — collapsed back upon himself, where he could not rest without disorder, he was, by the liberating grace of Christ applied to him in holy Baptism, set in order again and directed anew to his end, which

is God. Man, thus restored, if he again overturns this order, and, departing from his center and his highest end, turns to the creature and to himself, seeking in himself and in the creature his happiness and his rest, then becomes a sinner, and is made a slave of that love which is called the love of earthly or carnal concupiscence. The love of the creature, then, carried to the point of contempt for God, constitutes him a sinner; the love of God, carried to the point of a kind of hatred and contempt of himself and of the creature, brings him back into order, and therefore into righteousness.

V. If this is the sinner's condition, it is evident that he cannot pass from the state of Sin to justification except by retracing, along the opposite path, his way back to his end and to God — withdrawing his affections from creatures and turning them back to God, destroying the love of concupiscence, and causing the love of charity to be reborn in his own heart. This clear and precise notion of justification is indicated to us in many places in Scripture, where penance is called a return or a conversion: *Turn to me with all your heart; Convert us, O God*, etc. The very sense of the familiar term shows this to us, since the justification of the wicked is commonly called conversion, and it means, according to St. Augustine, the conversion of the creature to God.

VI. When man, therefore, returning into himself in the depths and the bitterness of his own heart, considers the straying of his own affections, he then conceives a holy indignation and a lively hatred of this condition of his, and is angry with himself for having strayed from his end. The grace that works in him these first movements of hatred and regret likewise excites in him that spirit of compunction and fervor by which he ardently desires to return to his end, and groans over the state of servitude and misery into which he has willingly cast himself. These are the first dispositions of a heart aspiring to justification — dispositions sufficient, by themselves, to overturn the irreligious systems of all those who claimed, in manifest self-contradiction, to restore the adult sinner to a state of habitual charity without his passing through any act of it.

VII. In this situation in which the humbled and confounded sinner finds himself, it is quite natural that he should wish to make satisfaction to God for his guilt; and if his feelings and his body served pleasure and sin, he now vividly wishes to subject them to punishment and mortification. The very nature of the human heart was bound to give rise to this desire. On this is founded the so edifying practice of the first penitents, who were never weary of punishing in themselves whatever had served their sin. It would, however, have been improper to leave this punishment to the free will of the faithful. Some, too fervent, would have exceeded the bounds of Christian prudence; others, too languid, would have fallen short. The Church, therefore, following the Apostolic examples, and especially that of St. Paul, established a certain method of discipline called canonical penance, common to all, but proportioned to each. This was not meant to be merely a punishment of guilt, but principally a disposition toward grace and its increase.

VIII. It is an infallible principle that grace does not ordinarily act all at once, but proceeds by degrees; it begins, it grows, it is perfected. When the sinner feels the first movements of heavenly charity, he must not remain idle, but must nourish them, foster them, and further them by his own efforts. Indolent idleness and an insensible indifference put these first dawnings of divine grace at too great a risk. Let the sinner, then, enter into retreat and solitude, withdraw from pleasures and distractions, nourish himself with prayer and the reading of holy books, live in fasting and humiliation, and he may reasonably hope that these first seeds will strike deep roots and take possession of the heart. Such were the admirable designs of the Church and of those great men who established the penitential Canons; from those same designs arose likewise that enlightened discretion which remitted a portion of this penalty to the more fervent, and was called an indulgence. A fervent and diligent penitent showed clearly that the charity of his heart was no longer languid and weak, but was advancing and growing. After such admirable and certain proofs, the Church, through her ministers, granted absolution — or, in the phrase then used, reconciliation and peace.

IX. In this marvelous and august order we recognize the full dignity of a Sacrament so necessary, cleared of the subtleties that became attached to it over time, without fearing the cold objection that in giving so much weight to charity, too much was being taken away from the authority of the ministry. We know, and believe most firmly, that the authority given to the Church to absolve from sins is a true jurisdiction, which not only declares the sinner absolved but truly looses him; but we believe equally that absolution does not make up for an ill-disposed heart or for the lack of charity — that is, of the dominant love of God. It is certain that perfect charity justifies even before absolution; but this charity is never perfect, in the present state of grace, unless it looks to and bears a relation to absolution, which is itself a part of the Sacrament of Penance; and grace itself — that is, the efficacy of the Sacrament — is precisely what obtains for us the increase of this charity, which the Priest's sentence can never supply if it does not already exist. In this sense we understand the words of the Fathers and of the holy Council of Trent, when they said that sacramental absolution supplies for the weakness of a charity which, outside the Sacrament, would not be sufficient to justify us. It is not absolution that makes up for this deficiency, nor does absolution confer habitual charity while leaving the penitent's acts in the state of weakness in which they are found; rather, the efficacy of the Sacrament strengthens actual charity, in such a way that it becomes sufficient to place him in a state of righteousness and holiness. It is, therefore, an unjust calumny to say that justification in the state of grace is more burdensome and difficult, on the ground that, besides the charity always required for reconciliation with God, confession and absolution are further required. Nor is it true that the new law added these new obligations in order to obtain justification; rather, through the power of the Sacrament, it made easier and more accessible this spirit of dominant charity, which in the old covenant was granted only as an extraordinary effort of God's Omnipotence, given to very few chosen souls, so as to continue that small number of the righteous whom the Lord always willed to have, both in the state of nature and under the Law, as anticipated foretastes of the Law of Grace.

X. Let us now reduce to an analysis, and to fixed and precise rules, the principles scattered thus far, drawing on antiquity and on the very nature of the Sacrament, and let us derive from them some conclusions of the greatest importance for practice:

1. The charity of God, ruling in our heart, is therefore absolutely necessary in order to receive the Sacrament validly, and this charity must show itself outwardly through a total turning away from vice, together with a lively desire to punish it in oneself. A conversion interrupted by relapses and halting shows that the heart is not yet converted, and slackness in the exercises of penance shows that the charity is still overly weak and infantile. In such cases the Priest must take great care not to grant absolution, so as not to expose himself and the penitent to a fresh sin.

2. The human heart, in the ordinary course, does not pass to extremes in an instant, and does not arrive at the state of righteousness except by degrees, just as it does not plunge into the depths of sin except after imperfections and failings have gone before it, which, insensibly taking advantage of man's natural weakness, eventually deprived him entirely of grace. The Confessor will therefore hold, as two fundamental maxims: first, that those sudden conversions arising from some extraordinary shock are always to be regarded with suspicion, and are more often the effect of an overheated imagination than of a real change of heart. The irregular commotion of those new practices called "exercises" and "missions," and the sudden terror of a storm or of some passing threat, perhaps rarely if ever succeed in producing a complete conversion, and those outward signs of emotion that appeared were nothing but passing flashes of a merely natural agitation. The second fundamental maxim is that the Confessor must watch carefully over that languid and worn-out tenor of life observed in many Christians. This sloth and this listlessness is not infrequently proof that a sovereign, dominant love no longer dwells in the heart of such a Christian, it being altogether certain that love is active and diligent; more often it is an insensible disposition toward grave falls. The Confessor, then, will not be so unwary as to leave these languid spirits at rest, nor to admit so readily to the Eucharistic Table — which is the bread of the strong — these weak and sickly men.

3. From the aforesaid principle arises also a terrible consequence, which assures us that the supposed conversions of habitual and repeat offenders are nothing but appearances and delusions. The state of grace is not unlosable, as the Protestant Innovators dreamed, and man can indeed pass from grace into sin; but the state of grace is not put on or taken off like a material garment, as the ancient and modern Pelagians claimed; it is, according to St. Paul and the Fathers, a state of stability and firmness. To pass from sin to grace, it is necessary to change the affections and the movements of the heart — to love what one hated, to hate what one had loved until then. This change is not the work of a single moment even in natural love, much less can it be so in supernatural charity, which is stronger and more enduring than that. The Confessor, then, will take great care not to grant absolution to such repeat offenders except after the longest trial and after a genuine change of life. To neglect this rule is the same as conferring the Sacrament on a person who is certainly ill-disposed, it being nearly

impossible that the heart should love in the evening what it fully hated that same morning. To this end he should keep ever before him the maxims so truly laid down in the *Officium de laborioso Baptismo* and in the *Pastor Bonus*, as well as the Instructions of St. Charles [Borromeo] — without forgetting, however, that the Saint made some allowances for the unhappiness of the times, though he wished, above all, that everyone should draw nearer to the wise discipline of antiquity and of the Fathers.

4. If charity is always weak at first, then, in the ordinary course, in order to obtain the increase of this charity, the Priest ought to have those acts of humiliation and penance precede [absolution] which the Church has so strongly recommended in every age. To reduce these acts to a few prayers and some fasting after absolution has already been granted seems rather a merely material wish to preserve for this Sacrament the bare name of "penance," than an enlightened and effective means of increasing that fervor of charity which ought to precede absolution. We are far from disapproving the practice of imposing penances to be performed even after absolution; since every good work of ours is always accompanied by our failings, how much more must we fear that we have mixed a great many imperfections into so difficult and important a work as our reconciliation; but we are, on the other hand, persuaded that these same penitential works, performed before reconciliation, would help obtain that increase of charity necessary for justification, which it would be vain to hope for afterward, had it been lacking beforehand.

5. Whatever, however, the state and fervor of the Penitent's charity may be, absolution is not a bare declaration that he has already been restored to grace, but a true act of jurisdiction, by which that Sovereign authority which Christ granted to the Church and to her Ministers is exercised over the sinner, so that they may exercise it in His name.

6. This authority can be exercised only by one who is constituted at least in the Order of the Presbyterate, to each of whom it is conferred immediately by God in the laying on of hands, called Ordination. But since this authority is exercised after the manner of a judicial act, it is fitting that, following the establishment of Dioceses and Parishes, each priest exercise this judgment only over persons subject to him, whether by territory or by personal right. To act otherwise would introduce confusion and disorder.

XI. As for the offenses over which this absolution must extend — offenses which the Scholastics called the "remote matter" of the Sacrament, a manner of speaking which the holy Council of Trent employed, perhaps against its own inclination, in order to make itself understood — we declare that we believe there is no sin which is by its nature unforgivable; but we cannot help admiring that so venerable discipline of antiquity, which did not so readily admit to penance — and perhaps never admitted at all — one who, after his first sin and first reconciliation, fell back into guilt. The fear of being excluded forever, even at the point of death, from communion and from peace, would be a great restraint on those who give little thought to the evil of sin, and fear it even less.

XII. The confession of venial sins is not forbidden, and in some cases may be commendable; but we would wish, in keeping with the spirit of antiquity, that such confessions not be so frequent as to make them seem of little worth. We do not, however, believe — as many hold, according to an irregular opinion — that such confessions expose us to the danger of sacrilege, apart from a directly intended contempt. This strange rigor rests on nothing but a poor scholastic style of argument never heard of in the Church before the "Arabian Philosophy" [scholastic Aristotelianism], as if it were a crime to grant absolution to a subject who lacks what it pleased these thinkers to call the "proximate matter" of the sacrament. We are, on the contrary, persuaded that it is, by its nature, a commendable act of humility to open to the priest, and to submit to the keys, one's own imperfections, even without having grave ones; nor can we understand how an absolution granted to one who is in a state of grace, and who performs an act commendable in itself, could make him gravely guilty merely because he lacks a fully formal detestation of those imperfections.

XIII. It is, moreover, absolutely necessary, as the holy Council of Trent teaches, that the penitent confess all his mortal sins and all the circumstances that can in some way alter the Confessor's judgment. If he is to be Father, Judge, and Physician, he must be acquainted with all the spiritual miseries and needs of his penitent, in order to comfort and instruct him according to the spirit of Christian charity and prudence. But however careful he ought to be to inform himself well of all the sins, we would nevertheless wish him to be still more diligent in examining the actual dispositions of the heart than the scrupulous, numerical enumeration of sins. The innumerable throng of Casuists, who applied themselves with such eagerness to counting, weighing, and distinguishing sins, without pausing to seek out the way to heal them, reduced this Sacrament to the state of mere materiality in which we now see it. Instead of instructing the faithful — of whom, for the most part without any real vocation, they made themselves masters in their own undigested rulings — they turned it into an arid, contentious, problematic system. The holy Council therefore desires to see all Priests charged with the care of souls devote themselves rather to becoming enlightened Directors and Teachers, after the ancient, noble simplicity of Christians, than to being minute and sophistic assessors of the gravity of sins — the exact weighing of which the Lord has often chosen to reserve to Himself alone, the sole infallible searcher of hearts and of the malice of evil deeds.

XIV. To conclude this important matter, something should be said about what the Scholastics called the "form" of the Sacrament. Modern Doctors commonly taught that it consists in the words *I absolve you from your sins*, etc., persuaded that, this absolution being a judicial act, it should not be administered with any other formality; and they regarded the other prayers and ceremonies as matters of propriety, not of necessity. The ancient Fathers and Teachers said nothing of this formula, and spoke instead of prayer over the penitent, and of the laying on of hands. We, wishing to renew, so far as possible, the ancient discipline without neglecting the present one, enjoin upon all Priests who administer the Sacrament of Penance not to content themselves with the words indicated above alone, but to join to the prayer also the laying on of hands. The abuse of omitting this imposition and this prayer, whatever the

pretext or motive for which it was introduced, remains altogether too contrary to venerable tradition. We therefore order all Confessors, in granting absolution to penitents, to begin the formula with *Misereatur tui*, keeping the hand extended over the Penitent, in whatever manner is most convenient, for the duration of this first prayer; then, continuing with the further words *Indulgentiam*, etc., they shall recite gravely to the end everything contained in the Roman Ritual, as will be set out more clearly in the new Ritual. They shall therefore take the greatest care not to transgress this rule, except in those very rare cases in which some sudden accident does not allow time for the whole ceremony. In such cases, if indeed they can occur, it is better to omit some part, however worthy of respect, than to abandon entirely the Christian for whose sake the Sacraments were instituted.

XV. We prescribe, finally, that what certain moderns called the "conditional form" must not, from now on, be used in any case. These are inventions of far too recent date, unknown to antiquity, ordinarily founded on childish arguments and on fallacies too unworthy of the gravity of this sacred function.

Indulgences, Reserved Cases, Excommunication, and Suspension — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

IX Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session V, pages 153–157. These four short sections form a single continuous sequence, numbered straight on from the Decree on Penance (which ends at Article XV): Indulgences (XVI–XVIII), Reserved Cases (XIX), Excommunication (XX–XXII), and Suspension (XXIII–XXV) — all treated as satellite topics of the sacrament of Penance and its exercise of ecclesiastical authority. The section ends just before the Decree on Extreme Unction. A consistent theme runs through all four: each censure or reserved power is traced back to what the Synod calls its "ancient" and "admirable" simplicity, contrasted with later "abuses" — the indulgence trade, over-broad reservation of cases, the ipso facto excommunication formula, and above all the suspensio ex informata conscientia (a suspension imposed without formal trial, on the strength of the bishop's private knowledge alone) — which the Synod treats as a species of arbitrary "Inquisition" incompatible with due process.*

On Indulgences

XVI. Indulgences are so bound up with the Sacrament of Penance that it is impossible to neglect setting down here a few principles concerning them, referring the reader, for a fuller account, to what is said in the *Historical-Dogmatic-Critical Treatise on Indulgences*.

Taken, then, in its precise sense, an Indulgence is nothing other than the remission of a part of that penance which the Canons established for the sinner. Since, in fixing the so-called penitential Canons, the Church certainly had in view the conversion of the sinner, but did not wish to burden him excessively, she always made a point of showing kindness and indulgence toward those who gave unmistakable signs of extraordinary fervor. The flood of barbarian invasions, the ignorance of those times, the self-interest of Ecclesiastics, and finally the enthusiasm of the Crusades overturned this admirable order, and caused the right understanding of it to be lost. The Scholastics who came afterward finished distorting the idea, and, swollen with their own subtleties, invented that strange, ill-conceived "treasury" of the merits of Christ and the Saints, substituting for the clear idea of absolution from canonical penalty the confused and false idea of the application of merits. If these merits were infinite, the treasury too had to be infinite; hence that scandalous squandering of Indulgences, which fed the people's ignorance all the more, and encouraged the false hope of making great profits from these supposed indulgences. What is still more regrettable, this fanciful application of merits was extended to the dead as well, and on this so ruinous a foundation there arose that

frenzied rush to multiply Indulgences for the dead, with those ridiculous tables of Indulgences posted up, applicable to the souls of the departed, to privileged Altars, etc.

XVII. Grieving with the deepest sorrow over these disorders, we would have wished to remedy them permanently even now; but, considering, on the other hand, that Indulgences bear a necessary relation to the whole system of penance, we believe we cannot give a proper ruling on the matter until the Ritual of the Diocese has been fixed and established — which we hope, through the paternal care and zeal of our Monsignor Bishop and Pastor, will be done at the next Synod to come. Once the order and duration of penance have been fixed in that Ritual, and those penitential canons suited to present circumstances and to the Diocese have been renewed, it will then be easy to introduce the ancient system of Indulgences, which Parish priests and Confessors will be able to grant according to their prudence, with the Bishop's authorization. These are our hopes and our wishes, and we trust in the mercy of Jesus Christ our Savior to see them soon fulfilled.

XVIII. In the meantime, however, we order, as an interim provision, that all tables of Indulgences posted on church doors be removed entirely, and especially those concerning indulgences for the dead, and privileged Altars. Indulgences must be conferred in the manner of an absolution, and for this reason Confessors, in the act of absolving penitents, shall declare to them that it is only by virtue of the Indulgence granted them by the Bishop, or in some other valid form, that they are dispensed from the obligation of submitting to the whole of canonical penance, and that this accommodation is granted them on account of the decayed state of present-day discipline. Parish priests shall take care to instruct their Parishioners in these maxims, so important for the reform of penance, making use, to this end, of the principles set out in the aforementioned work on Indulgences.

On Reserved Cases

XIX. As regards Reserved Cases, which were to have been treated at the present Synod according to the Letter of 6 March 1785, addressed to the Parish priests by our zealous Pastor, we believe we must postpone this matter to the next Synod, after the drafting and reform of the Ritual. The reservation of certain graver cases — which reminds us of a remnant of that admirable discipline that will always be the glory and honor of the earliest centuries of the Church — is, at present, nothing more than an ill-considered constraint on lower-ranking Priests, and a sound empty of meaning for penitents, who have grown accustomed to paying this reservation little mind. Once the Ritual and the order of penance have been reformed, we hope that reservations of this kind will no longer have a place, and that the idea of reservation can be given a better and more beneficial object for Christians. To this end, it seems, tend both the aims of our religious Sovereign and the pastoral concern of our Bishop, and we shall urge the Lord with our prayers that we may see this brought about permanently.

On Excommunication

XX. Excommunication is the greatest and final penalty the Church can inflict. We have its doctrine expressly in the Holy Gospel. *If your brother has sinned against you*, says the Lord, *go and rebuke him, between you and him alone; if he will not hear you, take one or two witnesses with you; if he still refuses to listen, tell it to the Church; and if he refuses to hear even the Church, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector*. To be divided from the Church, then, and cut off from her communion — this is what constitutes the nature and the effects of this penalty. A man who will not listen to the Church, and persists stubbornly in rebellion against her most serious precepts, and combats her doctrine with willful malice, is, if he does not repent when corrected, kept from participation in the divine mysteries; he cannot give his name among the common offerings, cannot join with others in public prayers, and, in short, every ecclesiastical and sacred bond with him is severed. This is why the most enlightened Theologians teach that the effect of excommunication is only outward, since it excludes only from the outward communion of the Church. It is sin alone which, by breaking the interior bonds of charity through which we are inwardly united to the body of the Church, thereby breaks interior communion, which cannot coexist with sin. We reject, however, the inaccurate and false idea held by not a few, who believe excommunication alone, by its own nature, sufficient to break every kind of communion in the goods of the Church; but we reject still more strongly the whole further crowd of effects which the poor impressions left by unfortunate studies, and the usurpations of the barbarous centuries, added to this ecclesiastical penalty — effects which cannot in any way alter the sacred teachings of Christ and venerable antiquity. Outward disabilities, temporal threats, acts of violence, exile, and other such penalties do not fall within the competence of the Church.

XXI. These principles established, we cannot but be alarmed on seeing, in some centuries now past, the recklessness and abuse of this penalty — which, without ceasing to be a punishment, Christ wished to make also a remedy leading the sinner to repentance, without provoking or destroying him. But we remain far more alarmed, together with the holy Council of Trent, on considering to what an exorbitant number these censures were multiplied, and for what utterly frivolous reasons they were exposed to ridicule rather than serving the benefit of sinners; and by what a strange overturning of ideas an attempt was made to introduce a kind of censure which the barbarous centuries called *incurred automatically* [*ipso facto*]. Such an excommunication, which bears none of the marks laid down by Christ, and disregards the degrees of warning He was pleased to establish, we recognize as an abuse without effect. How, indeed, in matters of such gravity, could a vague sentence, hurled without inquiry against unspecified persons unknown either to the judge or to the faithful — who are nonetheless required to withdraw from communion with them — be considered valid? We therefore believe it necessary, according to every natural and divine law, that excommunication must be preceded by an examination of the individual person, and that, for this reason, so-called *ipso facto* sentences carry no force beyond that of a solemn threat, without any actual effect.

XXII. From this two consequences follow: first, that the formula, introduced some centuries ago, of granting a general absolution from whatever excommunications the faithful might have incurred, is useless and vain. The effects of excommunication are outward, and, by its very nature, it excludes solely from the outward communion of the Church. How, then, could a person who has always continued in that communion without interruption, and without having been formally expelled from it, need to be readmitted to this outward participation?

Secondly, that those excommunications in which the order established by Christ, the supreme and infallible Head of the Church, is disregarded, are null and void. The squandering and abuse of a power never produces the effect that follows only from its legitimate use.

On Suspension

XXIII. What we have said thus far concerning excommunication — a general penalty affecting all the faithful — can serve as the basis and foundation for correcting the common notions surrounding suspension, a penalty no less severe, affecting only ecclesiastics. When a believer is lawfully admitted to sacred Ordination, or to the Presbyterate, he acquires, by divine dispensation, the right to exercise the ministry to which he has been raised, and in particular that of celebrating the divine mysteries. He cannot be stripped of this right without the gravest reasons, and without those precautions and that order which natural right requires in everything involving punishment or chastisement. To disregard this order would be to offend the most sacred bonds of society and of humanity, and would amount to the unjust and tyrannical oppression of a despot, rather than the discreet, medicinal penalty of an ecclesiastical government.

XXIV. We, therefore, while recognizing as legitimate the power of ecclesiastical superiors to examine and punish lower-ranking ministers according to the Canons, and consequently their power to impose suspension on Priests, nevertheless believe that such a right is in no way arbitrary, nor dependent on the private whims of a single individual, who could always abuse it. Such absolute dominion has always been rejected in the Church as a disorder contrary to nature itself, and a usurpation of the Church's own authority. For this reason we hold null and invalid all the so-called suspensions *ex informata conscientia* [imposed on the strength of the bishop's private, unproven knowledge] — which violence introduced, and which ignorance has maintained until now — and we are persuaded that the Bishops, some of whom, to such great edification, are renewing the paternal and loving exercise of their sacred authority, will wish these unreasonable abuses abolished forever. Every principle of reason, and every well-ordered government, requires that one not proceed to punishment without having proven the offense, and that no guilty party be punished without having been convicted, or at least informed, of his wrongdoing.

XXV. If, then, it is a duty of lower-ranking Ecclesiastics to show themselves humble and respectful in receiving the just and regular decisions of their superiors, it is likewise a duty of superiors to guard against any sentences that might smack of arbitrary domination and of

mere fact without due process. And we may well rejoice to see, continually, in the loving conduct of our Pastor, the examples of ancient episcopal gentleness and moderation renewed — he being altogether rightly persuaded that to act otherwise would be to cooperate in the overthrow of ecclesiastical discipline, and to reintroduce that species of Inquisition which the Sovereign Decrees of our most Religious Prince willed to be abolished forever.

Decree on Extreme Unction — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XI Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session V, pages 158–162, between the section on Suspension and the Decree on Holy Orders. It sets out the theology of the sacrament (its institution, effects, minister, and matter), then makes its one distinctive practical move: following the example of some French dioceses, it orders parish priests to restore the ancient order of administering Extreme Unction before Viaticum (the Eucharist given to the dying) rather than after — reversing what had become the standard Western practice — and to actively encourage this on the grounds that the "extreme" in "Extreme Unction" refers only to it being potentially the last anointing a Christian receives, not to any requirement that it be delayed to the point of despair of recovery.*

I. If there is a time when the adult Christian has more need than at any other of being sustained and strengthened by heavenly help against his spiritual enemies, it is certainly that in which God visits him with some grave bodily illness. Finding him then — oppressed with pain, drained of strength, sunk in a profound sadness of spirit, and troubled by the memory of his past failings and by the thought of the severity of divine justice toward sinners, which now presents itself to his mind as imminent — the enemy of mankind, who *always prowls about seeking whom he may devour*, will naturally make every effort and employ every device to induce him to sin, to plunge him into despair, and to drag him down with himself into eternal misery.

II. Jesus Christ, however, the source and meritorious cause of all the mercies God shows to fallen man, was not willing to fail to strengthen human weakness exposed to so dangerous a trial. To this end He established a means, or sensible sign, by which new spiritual strength might be given to the soul of the sick person, increasing charity within it and, consequently, ever further diminishing cupidity — from which it follows that this sensible sign must be called and regarded as a true Sacrament of the new covenant.

III. Indeed, this holy Synod, resting on the text of Chapter 5 of the Letter of St. James, on the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, on the consent of all the particular Churches, both Western and Eastern, and, finally, on the express definition of the holy Council of Trent representing the universal Church, firmly believes this sign to be one of the seven Sacraments of the new law, which remits the sick person's sins, and, by increasing charity in him, furnishes him with new spiritual strength to withstand the assaults of the powers of darkness. It likewise believes it to be a Sacrament that comforts the soul of the sick person in his fear of the approaching judgment, increasing his hope of obtaining from God the forgiveness of his sins through the merits of Jesus Christ, our one mediator, and that it thus serves to raise up

his downcast and dejected spirit. Finally, it believes it to have been instituted also to restore bodily health to the person, whenever this is expedient and advantageous for the health of the soul.

IV. This same holy Synod likewise believes that this Sacrament, instituted to furnish so much help to the sick person who receives it with the due dispositions, is that which the Fathers called, at times, the completion of Penance — on account of one of its effects — and, at other times, the oil of the sick, or the anointing with the sacred oil, with regard to the matter which Jesus Christ, together with prayer, willed to use in establishing this sacred sensible sign. From the thirteenth century down to the present, it has commonly come to be called by the name of Extreme Unction — not because one ought to wait to receive and administer it until the last moments of life, that is, when the force of the illness has by then removed all hope of recovery, but because, since it is supposed, at least according to the present discipline of the Western Church, that the sick person to whom it is to be administered is in some danger of death from the force of the illness, it is likewise supposed that this may be the last sacred anointing a Christian receives from the Church.

V. Although it is true that the word "Elder" [*Prete*, from Greek *presbyteros*], which St. James uses to designate the Minister of Extreme Unction, sometimes means the senior member of a community, we nevertheless believe that this word, in this text, denotes, on the part of that Apostle, none other than the true and properly so-called priests of the Church, with no exclusion whatsoever of Bishops; and we likewise believe this Sacrament to be validly administered by a single Priest.

VI. This is not to say that the Synod disapproves of the joint participation of several Priests or other ecclesiastics in the administration of this Sacrament; indeed, being persuaded, as it is, that when many join together to pray to God, they come, in Tertullian's phrase, to do Him a certain welcome violence, and thereby more readily obtain what is asked of Him, it not only approves but desires, for the sick person's benefit, such a joining of Priests or other Ecclesiastics — and even of lay persons — with the Parish priest, wherever this can conveniently be practiced.

VII. Since, by the testimony of the Apostle St. John, there is no adult Christian who can say he is without sins, and since one of the effects of Extreme Unction is the remission of sins, it is therefore beyond all doubt that whoever finds himself gravely ill cannot, without sin, neglect to receive this Sacrament, whenever he can procure it for himself without grave inconvenience.

VIII. If, however, the sick Christian is bound to seek for himself the help of Extreme Unction, it follows as a legitimate consequence that the Parish priest is under a strict obligation to administer it to him, provided the due dispositions are present in him. Indeed, we are persuaded that it is the precise duty of a vigilant Parish priest, one who loves his flock, to go at once to the house of his sick parishioner, so as to strive to dispose him to receive Extreme Unction fruitfully, and before the illness grows still worse. Nor do we believe the Parish priest

to be excused from this obligation by fear of contracting a contagious illness, since Jesus Christ teaches us that a good Shepherd must sacrifice everything, and even give his own life, whenever the salvation of the souls entrusted to him requires it.

IX. Until the thirteenth century, apart from a few particular cases, it was the constant practice in all the Churches to administer Extreme Unction to the sick before the Eucharist, since everyone at that time was persuaded that Extreme Unction was the completion of the Sacrament of Penance, and that it thus served to dispose the sick ever more fully to receive worthily the Holy of Holies. Afterward there arose the false opinion that Extreme Unction was a kind of public penance; and the faithful having likewise imagined that whoever had been subjected to this penance could no longer make use of Marriage, nor make a will, nor eat meat, it also came about that, for fear of having to abstain from such things, people began to delay receiving this Sacrament until the recovery of the sick person was by then despaired of. The death of such persons — which, under these circumstances, naturally tended to occur almost immediately after receiving Extreme Unction — gave rise to the belief that the Sacrament itself hastened it, providing yet another reason to delay it until the very last moments of life. The new name of "Extreme Unction," given to this Sacrament around the same time, and, still more, the false notion and interpretation of this new name, served to reinforce this prejudice in men's minds — namely, the belief that it should be received only after the Eucharist; and this opinion, growing ever stronger, came little by little to introduce, in the particular Churches of the West, the custom — which still persists in almost all of them — of administering Viaticum before Extreme Unction.

X. The holy Synod, therefore, gathered in the name of the Holy Spirit, desiring to recall and cause to flourish again, so far as the circumstances of the times allow, the ecclesiastical discipline of the fairest centuries of the Church, and wishing to follow the example given it on this point by certain other Churches, particularly those of France, enjoins upon Parish priests not only to administer Extreme Unction to those sick parishioners who request it before the Eucharist, but also enjoins them to exhort and endeavor to dispose everyone to receive it, and to request it before Viaticum. The holy Council is persuaded that the people will have no difficulty adapting to this point of discipline, provided the Parish priests take care to explain to them how the contrary custom came to be introduced; provided they make them understand that Extreme Unction is constantly depicted by the Fathers as the completion of the Sacrament of Penance, and therefore fit to dispose us ever more fully to receive Viaticum worthily; and provided, finally, that they impress upon them that, far from hastening the sick person's death, one of its effects is to restore bodily health to him, whenever this would be advantageous to the health of his soul.

XI. And since the spiritual helps that can be given to a gravely ill Christian are never excessive, when weighed against the snares the devil sets for him in such circumstances, this same Synod recommends that the Parish priest not abandon the sick person even after having administered to him the Sacrament of Penance, Extreme Unction, and Viaticum, until the danger has passed, or he has departed to the next life. For this reason, without favoritism or

distinction of persons — of rich or poor — the graver the illness becomes, the more he shall comfort and assist the person in danger, with his own prayers, counsel, and presence, or with those of another Ecclesiastic, or even of a layman of proven integrity, should something more than mere inconvenience — a genuine impediment — keep him away. He shall therefore take care to have ready such arguments as are fit to persuade anyone, and, according to the variety of the sick persons, their dispositions, and the circumstances of the times, the places, and the household, he shall employ different kinds of exhortation. To all, however, he shall generally exhort patience in bearing the discomforts of illness, and even death itself, in satisfaction for their own sins, and urge them to offer themselves with Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ in sacrifice to God, and to implore His mercy.

Decree on Holy Orders — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XXV Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session V, pages 163–180, following the sections on Penance, Indulgences, Reserved Cases, Excommunication, and Suspension, and preceding the Decree on Matrimony. This decree covers the theology and history of Holy Orders — its institution by Christ, the ancient discipline for choosing candidates, the historical corruption of that discipline through benefices and the "title of patrimony," and the Synod's practical reforms (tying ordination to genuine Church service, examinations of candidates, delaying the subdiaconate, coadjutor priests, and catechesis).*

I. From the very beginning of the world there were Priests, to whom the Ministry of Religion was entrusted. In the earliest times, the Heads of families and the Firstborn were chosen for this office — whether this came about through the tradition of the first Fathers, or in keeping with that religious instinct which taught men that the most august of things ought to be entrusted to the most qualified persons of those small societies. Afterward the Lord willed to establish another order for the ministers of the Altar. He chose a Tribe, and ordained that the sacred Ministers should come from the family of Aaron alone. By this He was preparing the way for the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, who was to replace the shadows with the truth, and, by a single Sacrifice, bring to completion the various sacrifices that preceded it. He therefore willed to raise the sacred Ministry to the highest degree of perfection. It was no longer to be hereditary from family to family, or attached to a single Tribe. He reserved to Himself the right to call to this Ministry whomever He pleased. He willed to form this distinct order of persons who would administer Religion. He Himself ordained His Ministers, and enjoined them not to choose any successor who did not show signs of a divine vocation. For this reason Jesus Christ willed to establish a particular rite, by which the sacred Ministers were to be set apart from the rest of mankind, and through which there would come to them, together with the power to exercise the divine functions, also the grace to exercise them rightly, and to fulfill worthily the great purpose of so august a Ministry. This rite consisted in the laying on of hands and in Prayer, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles; and this rite is what is called Holy Order, recognized by all Churches in every age as a true and proper Sacrament of the new covenant, by which whoever is to serve at the Altar is set apart from others, is given power and grace, and has his calling to the sacred functions sealed with an indelible character.

II. The Apostles, instructed by the divine Master, and filled with a right idea of the sacred ministry, gave us, in the Ordinations they performed, a shining example of the utmost caution and prudence to be used in so important a matter. The choice of ministers was preceded by the most fervent prayers, to be assured, by heavenly light, of the divine vocation; and the only

grounds that moved them to lay on hands were knowledge of the sacred writings, eminent holiness, a singular zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and a perfect virtue, attested by the practice of good works and by the public testimony of the people. Let one read the Acts of the Apostles; let one read St. Paul's letters to Titus and to Timothy, and one will see with what circumspection the Apostles proceeded in choosing sacred ministers, and how forcefully they impressed this on their successors: *Lay hands hastily on no one; let them first be tested, and then let them minister; let no one take this honor to himself, but only he who is called by God, as Aaron was*, etc. — so St. Paul often repeated. Nor was he content merely to recommend such caution in general. He chose to descend to the most minute detail of the qualities and virtues necessary in ecclesiastical ministers. He took care to describe precisely the qualities required in Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, of whom the hierarchy instituted by Jesus Christ is composed, as can be gathered from the Apostle's letters addressed to various Churches.

III. The Church, as the depositary and heir of this Apostolic spirit, shaped her plan for the ordination of sacred ministers along the lines laid down by the Apostle. She established that none of the faithful could be raised to the Priesthood unless he had preserved his baptismal innocence. She understood strictly St. Paul's words: *A Bishop must be blameless; he must be without reproach*; and although she knew that true penance blotted out all sins, she nonetheless did not want this alone to suffice for the choice of a sacred minister. Sin, in those times, was an irregularity that excluded one perpetually from the sacred ministry. The law was fixed: *No matter how good a cleric a penitent may be, let him not be ordained*. The Church was so strict on this point that not sin alone, but the mere suspicion of incontinence, was a canonical impediment. Hence it was established by law that bigamists were excluded from sacred ordination. In choosing ministers she had regard for nothing but purity of morals and innocence of life. Certain impediments arising later from bodily defects were of no concern at that time. *If anyone*, we read in an Apostolic Canon, *has lost an eye or is lame in the leg, but is worthy of the episcopate, let him be made [bishop]*. And a holy Bishop, as recorded by Palladius, used to say: *Let the old Law be observed among the Jews; but as for me, even if you bring me a man with a mutilated nose, if he is of good character, I will ordain him*. Only defects of the soul could, in those days, be an obstacle to sacred ordination.

IV. For this reason, the Church, intent solely on examining in her candidates the purity of their life and the signs of an ecclesiastical vocation, thought it right to establish various grades — the Subdiaconate and the four Orders called minor — not so much out of any necessity of ecclesiastical functions, as for a longer trial of the candidates' dispositions; so that, as Amalarius says, *the ascent to the priestly grade might be more gradual*. The Church's discipline concerning the intervals to be observed between one order and the next tended to this same end. These were observed in order to have longer and surer proof of the Clerics' vocation. Hence, if some Cleric was distinguished by holiness of life and judged worthy to ascend to sacred Orders, he was customarily promoted to the Diaconate or the Priesthood even without having held the lower grades, nor was he then said to be ordained *per saltum*

["by a leap"] — a term that came into use only later, once a change had occurred in ecclesiastical discipline.

V. The Church knew, moreover, that the sole title for sacred Ordinations is the necessity and the utility of the Church; that the Priest, by divine institution, is bound to the sanctification of the faithful, to instruction, and to the administration of the Sacraments; and that a minister may be given to the Church for this reason alone. The title of Ordination, therefore, was nothing other than the service of the Church; and this discipline was observed with such strictness up to the twelfth century that, amid the many abuses that had crept in, no Priest had until then been ordained *absolute*, as the Synod of Chalcedon puts it — that is, without being assigned to serve the Church. Ordinations that might be called ordinations of Priests *in partibus* [without an actual charge] were, up to those times, unheard of. An ecclesiastical minister who had not been ordained for the salvation of souls, for the administration of the Sacraments, and for the instruction of the people, would have been regarded as a monstrosity within the hierarchical order of the Church of Jesus Christ. Ordination and Benefice were, at that time, synonymous with service to the Church.

VI. So long as the Church governed herself by these principles in choosing her sacred ministers, she had the consolation of seeing the ecclesiastical order flourish, the dignity of her Pastors increase, models of the finest virtues set before the Christian people, faith and purity of morals spread, and the piety of the faithful grow ever more. The fair centuries of the Church show us the whole priestly brotherhood as a single family spread over all the earth, bound by ties of mutual communion, wholly intent on cultivating virtue and on stirring up in the people faith, charity, and observance of the law of God. A single spirit animated the whole Priesthood. Priests, together with the Bishops and under the Bishops, governed the people of the faithful with holy concord and brotherly harmony. All intent on their respective functions, they were far removed from disputes, rivalries, and jealousies. The sole object was the salvation of souls; the sole occupation was instruction, the word of God, the Catechism, the administration of the Sacraments, the spiritual direction of the people. The majesty of the Priesthood was an edification to the faithful, a source of respect among the nations, and a terror and confusion to its enemies. But those fair days passed, which had made the Church of Jesus Christ so beautiful in men's eyes. New principles were introduced, on account of which ecclesiastical discipline in the choice of ministers of the Sanctuary became corrupted.

VII. In the weakness of the times, the Apostle's saying, *A Bishop must be without reproach*, began to be understood in a broader sense; public sins came to be distinguished from hidden ones around the eleventh century. St. Peter Damian opposed such a distinction, and showed it to be contrary to the sanction of the Canons. He questioned Pope Leo IX on this point, who replied that, in the case of hidden offenses, the manner of dealing with offenders could be left to the judgment of the Bishops. He added, however, that he was speaking *by way of indulgence, not by way of command*. But such a distinction had already been introduced since the ninth century through the authority of the pseudo-Isidorian [decretals], which, having been found by Gratian in conflict with the ancient Canons, gave rise to the general

adoption of the compromise of distinguishing public offenses from hidden ones; and it was established that, to satisfy the Apostolic requirement, it was enough to be free of any sin at the moment the candidate presented himself for Ordination.

VIII. The Church attempted to oppose this relaxation of discipline, but, owing to the difficulty of the times, being unable to restore it to its former purity, she sought through various decrees to check the growth of the evil. Besides public offenses, she decreed that certain other offenses, though hidden, should likewise bar candidates from approaching Orders. But meanwhile, those offenses that render a person irregular came to be listed in Canon Law, and this led people to believe that only those specific offenses rendered the guilty party unworthy of sacred Ordination. For some time, then, it became customary to make no further examination of candidates' morals except with regard to sins constituting irregularity — until the holy Council of Trent reminded Pastors of their obligation to examine the life of candidates, and to exclude them from the sacred ministry for any offense whatsoever, even a hidden one, without their being able to be hindered in the exercise of this indispensable duty by any dispensation, or, as it is called, license *to have oneself promoted*.

IX. Another cause contributed to the relaxation of the discipline we are discussing. A false decretal ascribed to Isidore gave rise to the supposition that the minor Orders had necessarily to precede the sacred Orders. From this arose the opinion that the force, and almost the validity, of the higher Orders depended on having received the minor ones. Hence it was established that whoever ascended to the Priesthood without the lower grades was judged to be ordained *per saltum*, was declared irregular, and was obliged to make up what had been omitted. From this, men grew accustomed to regarding the ecclesiastical grades as essential parts of the sacred Orders, and as so many sacraments in themselves; and so, little by little, the notion that these were lower grades meant to test the candidate faded away, and it came to be thought that those initiated into the minor Orders had, as it were, a right to be admitted to the Diaconate and the Priesthood. This notion was bound to open the way to many all-too-easy Ordinations, since little or nothing was required to be ordained a Cleric, and whoever was ordained was regarded as entitled to be promoted to the higher Orders.

X. But nothing burdened the Church and the State with the useless weight of idle and unworthy Priests more than the distorted understanding of a Decree of the Lateran Synod under Alexander III. There it was decreed that the ordaining Bishop should be obliged to provide the necessary support to anyone he ordained without a title from the Church, provided the Priest so ordained had no means of his own by which to live honestly. Out of this Decree arose a new title for Ordination — namely, the "title of Patrimony" — which held almost universally from the thirteenth century down to our own times. It then began to be believed that the sole title for ordaining a Priest was not the service of the Church, but rather his ecclesiastical or patrimonial income for his own support. Hence arose the distinction between Order and Benefice; hence the Clerics' conviction that they were not obliged to serve the Church when not assigned to the care of souls, and lived off their own goods; hence the concern of the first Pastors turned chiefly to providing for the Clerics rather than to providing

for the Churches; and hence, finally, perhaps, that vast multitude of dissipated and useless clergy, which proves a scandal to the faithful and a sorrow to the Church of Christ.

XI. On this notion Benefices multiplied for the provision of persons, without any thought for the good of the Churches. Simple Benefices, Chaplaincies, Patronages, etc., which served as titles for Ordination, multiplied, and with the multiplication of Benefices the number of Priests grew beyond all measure; and while the Church groans for want of useful and fruitful laborers, a numerous Clergy lies in idleness, dissipation, ignorance, ease, and pleasure. Such a system was bound naturally to lead to disorders of this kind. The abundance of Benefices called for an abundance of Priests. Yet the necessary qualities in sacred ministers are found only in the few: *whatever is great is rare*, as Pope Zosimus said, speaking of candidates for Orders. On the other hand, care had to be taken not to leave Benefices vacant, and not to leave persons unprovided for. While every injustice was inflicted upon the Church, people hesitated to inflict it on the Clerics, especially if they were, as is said, already tonsured. And so, on the strength of these titles, every indulgence and facility had to be used in admitting them to sacred Ordinations.

XII. How much simpler and more fruitful was the system of antiquity! It is entirely just that ecclesiastics, serving at the altar, should live by the altar. But this support of theirs was drawn from the Patrimony of the Church, of which the Bishop was the depositary and the distributor, in proportion to the needs of the Clerics who rendered their service to the Churches. The Clerics were free from temporal concerns, and attended only to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. The Bishops ordained only that number of Priests necessary for the good of their Church, and provided them with the necessary support from the common fund of the faithful's offerings. The causes that led men to depart from so praiseworthy a custom are well known. But thanks be to the Lord, who has stirred in the heart of our most religious Sovereign a true zeal for the house of God, whereby, being intent on reforming the abuses introduced into the choice of Ministers and the granting of Benefices, he has established excellent provisions which recall matters to the ancient simplicity, and to the purity of that discipline so useful, in the earliest times, to the Church and to the State.

XIII. We therefore cannot but wholeheartedly applaud the Motu Proprio of His Royal Highness concerning the Parishes of Pistoia, of 21 July 1783, as well as the Motu Proprio of 28 July 1785, published on the 5th of August, and the other most wise decisions issued on the subject of Benefices and Clergy, the spirit of which tends to bring the revenues of Benefices — which, owing to the unhappiness of the times, had become scattered and diverted from the purpose of their original institution — back, according to primitive custom, into a common fund of the Ecclesiastical Patrimony; for they were destined in common to serve the outward worship of Temples, the maintenance of sacred ministers, and the relief of the poor. In this way the ease of giving the Church diligent and zealous ecclesiastics is promoted, since, the distribution of these revenues being entrusted to the Bishop's prudence, he has the means to educate young ecclesiastics in sound doctrine and piety, to secure their own subsistence, and to promote them to Orders according to the utility and the need of his Church. Secondly, the

inevitable abuse born of the corruption of the ancient discipline is avoided, whereby, while some Churches are in want, there are clerics who abound in superfluous income. Thirdly, the revenues of ecclesiastical Benefices are restored and secured to the purpose for which they were meant to be religiously preserved — the immediate service of the Church. Fourthly, the Clergy is freed from the care of temporal business, contracts, collections, and other such things, which degrade the dignity of the Priesthood in the public eye, and distract ecclesiastics from the far more important concern of divine things, to which they are destined by their vocation.

XIV. One of the greatest advantages we see in the reform now undertaken is having the means and the opportunity to be assured, as far as possible, of the ecclesiastical vocation of the young men to be promoted to Orders. The Priestly state, as our most religious Sovereign wisely observes in the Articles proposed to the Bishops and Synods, carries duties so grave that the longest and most mature reflection is not too much before embracing it. Hence it is a most wise sovereign suggestion not to grant the wearing of clerical dress before the age of eighteen, except to those living in Seminaries and in the service of the Churches; on which point, moreover, it would be desirable to find a way to remove this minor clergy from the Cathedrals or Collegiate Churches, providing in some other way for the service the clerics render — a service that costs them so dearly, both in conduct and in the studies they are forced to neglect. For serving Masses and performing other duties, good laymen could be chosen instead, with a modest monthly stipend. The Council of Trent suggested such a means for places lacking young Clerics. As for the other duties of Acolyte, etc., performed by these Clerics, older persons might be chosen, as was once the practice, when such duties were not reduced to a mere formality on the way to the higher Orders, but were a reward for piety, and sometimes for sufferings endured for the faith by those called Confessors. With this minor clergy of the Cathedrals and Collegiate Churches thus removed — clergy maintained, to the great detriment of the Clerics' proper discipline, under the ridiculous pretext of needing to serve Mass and recite the versicles, etc. — it will be far easier to achieve the goal of educating all Clerics in doctrine and piety in the places the Bishop designates for such formation.

XV. Nor can we fail equally to approve the sovereign suggestions concerning the examination of Clerics to ensure their vocation, to which the zeal of our most excellent and most vigilant Prelate perfectly corresponds through the various most wise provisions he takes to achieve this end. The holy Synod approves the method he has proposed for examining young Clerics on the new Catechism enjoined upon his Diocese by his Circular Letter of the first of May, 1782, and further hopes, from his insight and pastoral solicitude, that once he has shortly compiled a regulated course of studies to serve as a standard for Teachers, Lecturers, and young Ecclesiastics, following the principles of the Doctrine of Jesus Christ we have adopted, the long-desired uniformity of maxims — concerning faith, morals, and practice alike — will be achieved throughout the Diocese. Consistently with the examination of candidates for Orders as to their progress in study, integrity of morals, and signs of vocation, this Council believes it very fitting to establish that the synodal Examiners be the Parish priests and the

respective Rectors and Teachers of the Clerics in the Seminary and the Ecclesiastical Academy, who, more than others, are in a position to give an account of the character and conduct of candidates, and of their progress in studies suited to their age.

XVI. It is also necessary that, in passing from one Order to another, the same examinations of vocation, studies, and conduct be renewed with full rigor; and it is likewise a suggestion full of light and charity, made by our Royal Sovereign, that whenever, at any promotion before the Subdiaconate, the Bishop recognizes in some candidates either a lack of vocation or no aptitude for study, they should, rather than having their Ordination merely postponed, be advised sincerely and gently to choose some other path in good time — rather than being left, out of compassion, in false hope, thereby losing every other means of establishing themselves, or reducing the Bishop, through their own insistence, to the harsh necessity of ordaining them despite their unfitness.

XVII. But all this proves ever more the necessity of proceeding with the utmost circumspection and rigor in promoting candidates from one order to another, so as to be assured, with the greatest possible certainty attainable by human frailty, of their ecclesiastical vocation. This must be observed above all before binding them, through the Subdiaconate, to an irrevocable law of perpetual celibacy. The most mature and lengthy reflection on the candidate's dispositions will never be superfluous, in order to have a solid basis for hoping that the Lord will grant him the special gift of continence, without which it is vain to flatter oneself that one can observe it. Only long experience, and the signs of a true ecclesiastical vocation, can justly ground such a hope. For lack of the necessary caution on this point, it has happened that what ought to be the fairest jewel and ornament of the Bride of Jesus Christ has often been for her a source of the most bitter tears. It would therefore be desirable that Clerics not present themselves for the Subdiaconate except at a quite mature age, and after having seriously examined themselves, and after having, through sacred studies, come to know the obligations they are binding themselves to, and the eminence of the state they are about to embrace. At the very least, this holy Council would consider it most fitting that the Subdiaconate — apart from extraordinary cases in which circumstances lead the Bishop to act otherwise — be deferred until the age of twenty-four, and that the Bishop grant dispensation from the intervals between Orders instead, whenever the pressing need of his Diocese demanded such an accommodation, as has sometimes been done even in the most flourishing times of the Church.

XVIII. It also seems to us fitting that, with regard to the canonical impediments arising from offenses specified in law, no dispensation should ever be granted or admitted, so as to retain, in this way, at least a shadow of the ancient ecclesiastical discipline. It has been shown above how the relaxation of discipline arose on this point. The Church sought to set a barrier against the growth of this evil by fixing certain offenses that would entail irregularity. The continual dispensations granted render null and ineffective the remedy she intended to oppose to laxity. As for the canonical impediment arising from bodily defects, etc., established since the fourth century, it is certain that irregularity is not incurred unless the defect is such as to prevent the

exercise of sacred functions, or does not allow it to be performed without grave scandal and unseemliness. This is the reason always indicated by canon law. Now, if the bodily defect gives rise to the disorder mentioned, it is not right to grant a dispensation; otherwise, there is no irregularity at all. Since, then, it belongs to the Bishop to judge the nature of the defect, it likewise belongs to him to decide whether or not the person with the defect should be admitted to Ordination. Finally, as regards the other canonical impediments — some of which arose from circumstances that no longer exist, and for some of which the excellent gifts of learning and piety a person may possess, or the pressing needs of the Diocese, may outweigh the impediment — the prudent judgment of the Ordinary may decide, according to the circumstances of place, time, and person, whether it is fitting to allow an accommodation or dispensation.

XIX. With the method just described for choosing sacred Ministers, one may hope that useful Priests will be given to the Church. But since *neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase*, this holy Council believes it altogether necessary that all fellow-Priests, particularly in the time preceding sacred Ordinations, and during the Ember Days, offer God the most fervent prayers, that He may deign to send zealous Laborers into His vineyard, and pour His blessings upon the candidates, so that, furnished with the gifts of divine grace, they may be an edification to the faithful, a benefit to the State, and a consolation to the Church. For this same reason it is necessary that all Pastors exhort the people, especially during the Ember Days, to join their prayers to those of the Clergy; and, so that the faithful may be moved to do this with fervor, the Parish priests must make them aware of the concern they ought to have for the choice of good ministers, and frequently explain to them the august dignity of the sacred Orders and of the Priesthood, and the qualities candidates must have to be admitted, and the causes which, according to the prescription of the Canons, render them unworthy of sacred Ordination; so that the faithful, instructed in the eminent holiness required of sacred ministers, may better understand the need to turn to God in prayer, especially on those Ember Days established by the Church herself to move the people, through fasting and prayer, to implore from God the necessary light for the Diocese's chief Pastor in choosing candidates, and an abundance of His graces upon the candidates themselves.

XX. Finally, the holy Synod makes it a duty to applaud the wise provisions of His Royal Highness concerning the granting of Benefices, in the course of which, as noted above, countless corruptions and abuses had crept in over the centuries. Nothing could be more canonical than the provision of the aforesaid Motu Proprio of 28 July 1785, which orders that ecclesiastical revenues serve their true and legitimate purpose; and it accordingly prescribes that simple Benefices — whether of ecclesiastical collation, royal appointment, or private patronage — may be conferred only on persons who have actually served the Church, or are currently serving it, or are disposed and in a position to undertake the necessary studies and exercises to become fit to serve it — never on persons who would enjoy them merely as patrimonial income, usurping them under the sole guise of clerical dress. And in order to

remedy not only the evil for the future, but also, as far as possible, the abuse of the past, the suggestion His Royal Highness makes to the Bishops is a most prudent one: that their vigilance oblige all newly beneficed simple clerics to a proportionate, actual service, with the power to suspend the income of those who, holding Benefices of ecclesiastical collation, fail in their duty, and to request the same suspension, in like case, for those holding Benefices by Royal appointment or private Patronage. And although the Sovereign leaves the Bishops free to use prudent tolerance toward those already in possession of such Benefices — especially the more elderly, for whom it would be difficult to adapt to a new system — the Synod at least urges the Bishop to take measures regarding the wealthier and richer simple Beneficiaries, prevailing upon them to furnish some subsidy to the neediest Churches.

XXI. These provisions rest on the great, incontestable principle that whoever is ordained a Priest contracts, by that Ordination, the precise obligation to serve the people and the Church in all ministries inherent to the Priesthood; and since it is most certain that it is not the sole duty of a simple Priest to celebrate Mass, but that each of them is further obliged to serve the Church through the administration of the Sacraments, through instruction, through attendance on the sick and dying, and through helping the Parish priests in their duties, the suggestion the Royal Sovereign makes to the Ordinary — to consider how to make all the Priests in his Diocese active and useful in proportion to their strength and abilities — is most praiseworthy. The Sacred Synod therefore commends the Bishop's zeal and insight in responding, precisely on this point too, to the pious intentions of His Royal Highness by incardinating all Priests holding residential benefices to the Church where the benefice is founded, and all simple Priests to the Church of the Parish priest where they live, so that there, under the Parish priest's authority, they may assist at the sacred functions and, under his direction, exercise all those ecclesiastical ministries of which they are capable — the Parish priest being enjoined to report to the Bishop every six months on their conduct and the fulfillment of their duties. As for the numerous Clergy of the Cathedral, or Collegiate Church, the Synod approves the application, there, of the regulation prescribed for the Collegiate Churches of Prato in the Motu Proprio of His Royal Highness of 23 July 1783, § 25, which requires the Chaplains attached to the Churches of the Prisons and of the "Giglio" to bear, besides their daily office there, the further duty of hearing confessions either in those Churches or in others of the City or its outskirts, where they may in that case celebrate Mass and assist the Parish priest, as ordered by the Bishop or Vicar; and they may also be assigned to substitute in hearing the confessions of Nuns. It matters too much, for the good of the Church and the salvation of souls, that all Priests devote themselves to the ministries inherent in their office. For this the Synod urges the Bishop to turn his attention also to the Cathedral Chapter, and, with the counsel of some Parish priests and Canons, to establish provisions that may make this part of the Clergy, too, permanently more useful to the Church.

XXII. Adhering meanwhile to the sanctions of the Canons, the holy Synod declares it absolutely necessary for the good of the Church and the salvation of souls never to allow several residential Benefices to accumulate in the same person, and therefore that any

derogation or dispensation of any kind whatsoever obtained on this point must be absolutely rejected, and must be regarded as abusive and derogatory to an essential article of ecclesiastical discipline. We are likewise persuaded that, according to the spirit of the Church, no one may hold more than one Benefice, even a simple one. On this point, however, we very highly commend the Royal Sovereign's maxim, suggested to the Bishops, of uniting all simple Benefices of ecclesiastical collation or patronage — and, with prior royal assent, those of communal patronage or pious foundations — and of enlarging them by the aggregation of chaplaincy duties and Mass endowments, so as to form a single fund to be placed in the Ecclesiastical Patrimony, from which fitting subsidies might be drawn for needy ecclesiastics. And until such time as His Royal Highness is pleased to take measures regarding lay Patronages — by virtue of the Prince's right to redirect, for the better, the pious intentions of the deceased — the holy Council blesses the Lord for having inspired the Sovereign with the thought of encouraging Bishops to reject candidates presented by Patrons when, after a serious examination, they judge them incapable of laboring fruitfully for the people's salvation in the pastoral care; since the Patrons' right does not extend to giving the people a less capable minister, and the people's right to be well assisted and instructed takes precedence. In this way the Bishops are restored to the free exercise of their authority, and the Church is provided with good and zealous Ministers. We therefore cannot sufficiently urge the execution of the Circular of 2 March 1782, and of the further one of 6 June of the same year.

XXIII. It is likewise a most useful and most holy provision to give Parish priests who need them Coadjutor Chaplains with a fitting, stable stipend. In this way, besides the necessary relief of the Parish priest, the Parish is far better served, and, on the other hand, under the direction of the chief Parish priest, the Coadjutors are trained in the care of souls, and become capable of being promoted, at the respective vacancies, to the headship of the Parish itself. On this point the Synod judges it very fitting that, at a vacancy in a Parish, the order of seniority among Chaplains be observed for promotion, where merit is equal — always assuming the qualities necessary for the governance of souls. This holy Council, moreover, urges from the depths of its heart that all chief Parish priests regard their Coadjutors not as servants, but as brothers, as fellow-workers in the exercise of the pastoral care. In the kingdom of Jesus Christ there is no place for a spirit of domination, harshness, or despotism; it is a kingdom of gentleness, charity, and persuasion. He who is first must be last in humility of heart, according to the teaching of Jesus Christ. In the governance of the Church, precedence brings nothing but a greater burden, a more ardent zeal, and a greater activity in procuring the salvation of souls. The chief Parish priest therefore has the precise duty to go before the others in good example, in labor, and in pastoral care, in all that concerns the edification and the salvation of his people. His Coadjutors would be, not a relief to him, but rather a hindrance to his eternal salvation, were they employed by him in duties foreign to their sacred ministry, or made to serve as an excuse for his own negligence in the exercise of his pastoral duties; on the other hand, the Synod urges upon the Parish priest's Cooperators due subordination, vigilance, and zeal in fulfilling their duties, and in sharing with him the pastoral care in that

spirit of love and charity which unites them, under his direction, to work together, in holy rivalry, for the salvation of the people.

XXIV. The instruction of the people is one of the chief pastoral cares. A people soundly instructed in the truths of religion will, with the Lord's grace, bear fruit unto eternal life, and will be the consolation of its Pastor. Our most zealous Prelate has impressed upon his Parish priests, in several Pastoral Letters, the indispensable duty of instructing the Faithful, and the manner of fulfilling it. He has recommended the best books from which the people's solid instruction may be drawn; and we wish that the Bishop's prescription in his Circular Letter of the first of May, 1782, be regarded as a synodal law: namely, to use, for adults, the excellent Catechism printed in Naples and later, most recently, in Venice, under the title *Christian Education and Instruction, or a General Instruction in Christian Truths in the form of a Catechism*. We also approve the Catechism for children by Monsignor Montazet, currently being reprinted in Prato, which is now used by the majority of Parish priests, and which has now been adopted by our Bishop, and by three other of his venerable brother Bishops — the Bishop of Cortona, the Bishop of Colle, and the Bishop of Chiusi and Pienza — for use in their Dioceses, all of whom, together with him, have likewise adopted the larger Catechism.

XXV. Having established the aforesaid regulations concerning the most essential points for the choice of sacred Ministers, for the granting of Benefices, and for the good order of the Clergy, the holy Synod reserves the right to offer its further recommendations on other matters necessary for the complete reform of the Diocese, whenever it shall please its chief Pastor to convene his brethren again. Meanwhile, the Synod, persuaded that the Bishop has received from Jesus Christ all the rights necessary for the good governance of the Diocese entrusted to him, hopes from the Prelate's insight and pastoral solicitude not only for the most effective execution of the provisions established in concert with him at this sacred assembly, but that, following the path marked out, he will continue with all zeal toward the most perfect establishment of ecclesiastical discipline, in the face of all contrary customs, exemptions, or reservations that stand in the way of the good order of the Diocese, the greater glory of God, and the greater edification of the faithful. For the Synod is persuaded that the Bishop is the immediate Pastor of the Diocese entrusted to him, and that his rights, received from Jesus Christ to govern the Church, are unalterable and unimpedable; and although, in certain circumstances, their exercise may have been interrupted — whether by cession, by abuse, or by any other cause whatsoever — the Bishop can, and must, nonetheless always re-enter into his original rights whenever the greater good of his Church requires it.

Decree on Matrimony — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XXV Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session V, pages 181–190, the final decree of the session, following the Decree on Holy Orders. It opens with the theology of marriage as sacrament (Articles I–VIII), then moves to the decree's most consequential claim: that the power to establish diriment impediments to marriage (impediments that render a marriage null, as opposed to merely unlawful) belongs originally to civil Sovereigns, and that the Church exercises it only by their tacit consent (Articles VII, XI–XII) — the same position argued at length, against a named dissenting Father, in the Session VI Acts already translated. The rest of the decree (Articles XIII–XXV) is pastoral: banns of marriage, pre-marital instruction and confession, the conduct of the wedding day, and the religious and civil education of children.*

I. One of the truths expressed with great clarity in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament is the divine institution of Marriage, inasmuch as it is an office of nature consisting in a most close society and union between two persons of different sex, so that they may render each other mutual help in the common needs of life, and principally so that they may have children and raise them virtuously.

II. But carnal men, hard of heart, soon strayed from the primitive institution of Marriage, and the Jews themselves lived in this same error under the Mosaic Law. Whereupon Jesus Christ, who was pleased to bring the works both of nature and of the law to perfection, restored it entirely — by forbidding the simultaneous plurality of wives, and by declaring, both in His own person and, still more distinctly, through the Apostle Paul, that the bond of a perfect Marriage cannot be dissolved except by the death of one of the Spouses.

III. Nor was this enough for our most wise and loving Redeemer and Lawgiver Jesus, since He willed further that Marriage should be, among His followers, a sign of His own union with Holy Church — frequently designated in the Sacred Scriptures by the name of His most beloved bride, and from which the husband derives his dignity and authority as head — and, sealing it moreover with His own blood, according to the constant Tradition of the Fathers St. Ignatius, Tertullian, St. Cyril, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and many others, He added to it the blessing of His Almighty Grace, to sanctify the souls of the Contracting parties, to keep them firmer in the fidelity they pledge to one another, and to make them capable of duly fulfilling the most grave duties of their state. For this reason, instructed by these same Fathers, by various Councils, and, most clearly, by the Council of Trent, we confess Marriage to be a true and proper Sacrament of the Gospel Law, to be numbered among the seven instituted by Jesus Christ.

IV. With good reason, therefore, that same most holy Council, intending to check the rashness of those who, by removing Marriage from the number of the Sacraments, also removed from the Church a portion of the spiritual power granted her by her divine Founder, was able to declare that controversies concerning the validity, efficacy, and proper administration of Marriage, insofar as it is a Sacrament — as well as concerning the dispositions needed to receive it worthily — fall within the competence of Ecclesiastical Judges.

V. Considering, moreover, that the aforementioned Fathers unanimously attach the grace and holiness of Marriage to the blessing or prayer of Priests, before whom Holy Church has always required Spouses to present themselves, on pain of being counted among the greatest sinners, we are of the opinion that this same blessing or prayer — which, however it may vary in wording according to the different rites of various places and nations, nonetheless retains the same efficacy and meaning — must be regarded as one of the constituent parts of the Sacrament of Marriage. We accordingly do not hesitate to affirm that the Parish priest of one of the contracting parties, or the Priest delegated by him or by the Bishop to pronounce it, is its sole and true Minister. Otherwise we would not understand how the Apostle could require the faithful to regard Priests as Ministers of Jesus Christ, and dispensers of the divine Mysteries, without exception. And we are confirmed in this conviction by not a few Rituals of various Catholic Churches, and by that of the Roman Church herself, published by order of Pope Paul V, in which the Parish priest is openly declared the Minister of Matrimony, as of the other Sacraments that do not fall within the competence of the chief Priests — that is, of the Bishops.

VI. From this, although it follows that the contract does not essentially and by its own nature include the Sacrament, it cannot, however, be inferred that it is within the faithful's discretion to separate the two. Indeed, the Sacrament having been instituted to confer, as we have explained, the grace necessary to bear the weight of married life, the precept to receive it is clear, and to neglect it would therefore be to make oneself guilty of grave fault.

VII. Certainly Jesus Christ, no less true God than true Man, held in His hands all the rights of Kingdoms; but, having come into the world to establish there a Kingdom wholly spiritual, and to merit for mankind, by His death, the right to the Kingdom of Heaven — not to seize the fleeting and mortal ones — He willed to leave the exercise of those rights entirely free to earthly Rulers, and enjoined on all the living a perfect subjection to the Sovereignties of the earth in everything regarding public outward discipline, without any distinction whatsoever — as Chrysostom teaches — between layman and Evangelist, Prophet and Apostle, or anyone else. We therefore do not hesitate to assert that it belongs, by full right, to the supreme civil Power to prescribe, for all contracts, and most particularly for the marriage contract, whatever laws it judges expedient for the peace, benefit, and propriety of families within its own Dominions. And from this we conclude that it belongs originally to that Power alone to impose upon the marriage contract that kind of impediment which renders it null, called diriment impediments. We therefore declare that we do not recognize a Sacrament in the

sacred rite intended for the sanctification of Marriage in those cases where the contract itself has been declared null by the Sovereign's Laws, but rather an attempted act and a sacrilegious profanation.

VIII. Indeed, such a power, even in Catholic Sovereigns, was constantly recognized by the holy Fathers Ambrose and Augustine, by many Councils, and by the Roman Pontiffs themselves — particularly with regard to the impediment arising from the various kinds of consanguinity and affinity — before certain false documents were spread within the Church, the disastrous cause of the corruption of ecclesiastical discipline and of the grievous discords between the Priesthood and the Empire. For not only did these authorities regulate themselves exactly according to the many Imperial Laws on Marriage still to be read in the Theodosian and Justinianic Codes, whenever they did not find them opposed to the divine natural or positive law, but they even took pride in publishing them, commended them, and went so far as to canonize them, inserting them into the codes compiled as the rule of ecclesiastical discipline.

IX. For this reason, having frequently observed that, under the pretext of mere betrothals — which are nothing other than a preparatory pact for the contract and Sacrament of Marriage — the betrothed permit themselves many things contrary to divine and ecclesiastical law, we resolve to submit our humble petition to the Prince, that he may deign to deny all standing in the external forum to betrothals themselves. Thus, women being made more cautious about yielding to the flattery of seducers, those aggravated seductions will become rarer which are ordinarily the unhappy origin of troubled and scandalous marriages.

X. Instructed, moreover, by constant experience that, in the small and not very numerous communities of this Diocese, the present multiplicity of matrimonial impediments is of the gravest inconvenience and public harm, and further a spiritual stumbling-block to the faithful entrusted to our care, wishing to follow in the footsteps of so many most venerable sacred Pastors who have illustrated the Church with their holiness and learning, we propose to petition His Royal Highness that he deign:

1. To remove from the number of diriment impediments both spiritual kinship [between godparents and godchildren] and the so-called impediment of public decency, the origin of which we find in the collection of Justinian's laws.

2. To restrict the impediment both of affinity and of consanguinity, arising from any lawful or unlawful union whatsoever, to the fourth degree, according to civil computation along the collateral or oblique line, without, however, leaving any hope of obtaining a dispensation from it.

3. Finally, to have the clemency to take into consideration those marriages that are contracted in a tumultuous manner and by surprise, with the Parish priest more absent than present in substance — who, in his consternation, can scarcely hear the voice of the contracting parties, and does not see the faces of the witnesses, who sometimes present themselves disguised or armed. Such Marriages, if one considers that, for the validity of civil acts of far less

importance, it is required that both the Notary and the witnesses be duly summoned and formally engaged, may seem rather acts of formal contempt for the grace of Jesus Christ, and attacks upon good public order, than contracts lawfully celebrated.

XI. This is not to say that Sovereigns have always exercised this original right of theirs — which is essentially connected with the right to dispense — by themselves alone; indeed, for many of the centuries nearer our own, it appears that they had for the most part left its exercise to the Church.

XII. Granting, then, such consent or connivance, we confess that the Church has rightfully been able to establish diriment impediments to the marriage contract itself, and that she made no error at all, given the circumstances of the times, in establishing them — as the holy Council of Trent rightly decided against the Innovators.

XIII. Marriage being a solemn contract on which the strength, good order, and distinction of civil society principally depend, and being, moreover, as the Apostle expresses it, a great Sacrament — when, according to the institution of Jesus Christ, it is in some manner sealed by the Priestly blessing — no diligence or care can be reputed superfluous on the part of Parish priests to ensure that an action of such interest to the State, and so holy, be carried out with the full rigor of the Laws and of the sacred Canons. Of this they will be all the more fully convinced the more seriously they consider that these pastoral concerns of theirs, whether exercised or neglected, can, within the space of a few years, produce either a Christian reform or a total depravation of their Flock.

XIV. And therefore, on learning of some marriage negotiation, the Parish priest, should he not be fully informed of the fitness and conduct of the future spouses, shall take care to inquire into it with prudent exactness, so as to instruct them properly, where they should need it, in the rudiments of our most holy Religion, to warn them not to enter the married state without the consent, as far as is right and possible, of their elders, and without first coming to know and maturely weigh its most grave burdens, and, finally, to dispose them, through sincere penance, to receive that grace from the Sacrament of Matrimony which can render those burdens light and sweet to them.

XV. In order to invite all the Faithful to pray to the Lord to pour out the treasure of this grace upon the newly married, and to make it easier to discover the many impediments that can render a Marriage either null or unlawful, it was decreed by the general Lateran Council under Pope Innocent III that the most praiseworthy practice of publishing the banns of Marriages to be contracted — as had been done by the respective Parish priests in the Churches of Gaul — should be extended generally: a Decree to which the Fathers of Trent, having added certain clarifications, enjoined the most exact observance.

XVI. The conversion of a sinner, although it can be brought about in an instant by Him who holds the hearts of men in His hand, and can bend them, inspiring them with a holy love, wherever He wills — is nevertheless not ordinarily the work of a few days, and it is clear that time, and the gathering of the people, are needed to achieve the other purposes stated above.

Parish priests, therefore, shall in the first place employ all those wholesome arts which the Apostle suggested to Timothy and Titus, to induce those who aspire to Marriage not to bind themselves in promises, and not to request the publication of banns before they have cleansed their conscience by sacramental confession — especially if they are known to be negligent in approaching the sacred Tribunal of penance, and of not very regular conduct. Secondly, the three distinct publications of banns prescribed by Trent shall be made only at the Parish Mass, immediately after the explanation of the holy Gospel given to the people, warning them, in a clear and distinct voice, of the obligation resting on each to disclose any impediments known to them. Thirdly, it would be desirable for Sundays alone to be the legitimate feast days for the publication of banns, referring, as to dispensation from them, to the provisions of the aforesaid Council.

XVII. As regards vagrants, and those without a fixed domicile, in order to conform ever more fully to the spirit of that holy Council, which on this point calls for the assistance of the civil Magistrates, it may be proposed to His Royal Highness that banns be absolutely refused to any of them who does not produce a certificate or license from some Royal Deputy appointed for this purpose. There being, then, such a Royal Minister appointed for this with regard to children of the Foundling Hospitals, Parish priests, once they have formal notice from him to publish the banns for any of these, shall do so without difficulty, and, no lawful impediment appearing, shall proceed to the celebration of the marriage in accordance with the Circular addressed to the Vicars Forane on 4 December 1785. And so that every Parish priest may be in a position to certify to the status of his parishioners as needed, he shall keep the marriage register in accordance with the Decree of Trent, and in execution of the Orders issued by the Government on this point.

XVIII. And since, according to the ordinary custom, which we cannot sufficiently deplore, the wedding day tends to be a day of dissipation and license, the holy Synod prescribes that all Parish priests exhort the newly married to receive holy communion either beforehand, or to defer it after the celebration of the marriage, more or less, according to the varying disposition of the parties.

XIX. Should it ever happen — which we hope, with divine help and the observance of the rules set out above, will not occur — that persons present themselves at the Church to fulfill the sacred marriage rite either ignorant of the first rudiments of Religion or sunk in the mire of vice, the Parish priest, on learning this through sacramental confession, and reflecting that solid instruction cannot be conveyed in a few words, and that a sincere conversion necessarily involves not merely the cessation of wrongdoing but its detestation, shown by unmistakable signs, shall deny them absolution, and, showing them the enormity of the sin they are about to commit by receiving the Sacrament of Marriage in such a state, shall urge them to postpone it. But should they be unwilling to heed such wholesome counsel, or should the delay of the Marriage itself risk consequences no less serious, then, having roused them to make an effort at repentance, he shall offer no further resistance to the completion of the sacred nuptial rite.

XX. Should the Parish priest, on the very day set for the celebration of the wedding, discover some diriment impediment — even should this become known to him through sacramental Confession, the seal of which must always be preserved — he shall do everything possible not to officiate at it; and charity and prudence will suggest to him the appropriate means for postponing it without injury to the conscience or the reputation of the spouses, or for preventing it altogether, should the impediment be of a kind admitting no dispensation. This will prove easier for him if he has instructed the People concerning the nature of impediments, and has shown them that most of these are free of any wrongdoing, since wrongdoing alone can bring just disgrace.

XXI. Returning to the institution of Marriage, and considering it as an office belonging both to nature and to civil society among Christians, it is easy to understand that both spouses must love, bear with, and help one another in every need, preserving above all an inviolable fidelity; and it is likewise evident that they are bound to take the utmost care for the nourishment and the spiritual and temporal education of their children. Meanwhile, however, very grave abuses are observed with regard to this upbringing, introduced by the ignorance, indolence, and even the disorderly conduct of parents. It shall therefore be the precise duty of Parish priests to give the People sound and clear instruction on this most important subject, so that married persons who have been negligent in fulfilling their marital duties may recognize their failings and make what amends they can, and that those still unmarried may learn not to let themselves be led, like brute beasts without reason, by passion in deciding on Marriage. Of this disorder — against which both reason and the rights of civil society protest — we have a terrible example in the Sacred Book of Tobit.

XXII. For this reason, they shall show, both in the general instructions and in those specially given to spouses, that spiritual education consists:

1. in teaching children the principles of Christian Doctrine from their most tender years;

2. in instilling in them a holy fear, and a fervent love of God and neighbor;

3. in reinforcing good teaching with good example;

4. in correcting and punishing them, from time to time, joining gentleness to severity, and without heaping curses or abuse upon them.

XXIII. As for nourishment and temporal upbringing, they shall, first, make mothers and wives understand that far graver reasons than those commonly alleged are required to excuse them from nursing their children; 2. they shall demonstrate that both Parents, and especially Fathers, must provide their children with necessary and decent food and clothing until these are of an age to procure such necessities of life for themselves; 3. that they are not permitted to squander the means granted them by divine providence, but must leave them in good order to their own descendants; 4. finally, they shall insist on the other most grave duty of making their children capable — not merely, if they are poor, of earning their own subsistence, but of rendering good service to their fellow men and to the State, whatever their condition may be,

through some honest science, liberal art, or trade — carefully exploring their inclinations and encouraging them so far as prudence and their abilities allow.

XXIV. If Marriage, considered merely as a natural and civil contract, demands so much of Christian spouses, how much more should Parish priests be enkindled with a holy zeal to have it venerated as a Sacrament — reflecting that, among all the Sacraments, it is in the reception of this one, above all, that the precious Blood of Jesus Christ is trampled underfoot without a shudder, and almost in a spirit of revelry.

XXV. And therefore the Parish priest, besides watching over the observance of the Church's general precept forbidding weddings during the penitential seasons of Lent and Advent, shall do everything he can to prevent the spouses from cohabiting, or associating too familiarly, before the Marriage has been celebrated. Nor shall he tire of exhorting them, and all those customarily invited to the wedding, not to appear at Church on that day in immodest dress, or with ornaments breathing luxury and sensuality. They shall likewise instill in them a holy horror of intemperance, gluttony, and every kind of dissoluteness in speech, in songs, and in the other entertainments of the wedding. They shall persuade them, finally, not to celebrate weddings on feast days of full obligation, so as not to draw a good number of people away from attending the Parish's sacred functions, and to avoid the risk of profaning, together with the Sacrament, those days which are set apart in a special way for divine worship and the sanctification of souls.

Session VI — 27 September 1786

Decree on Prayer — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XXXIII Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session VI, pages 195–211. The decree has two parts: Articles I–XVII, headed simply* ***"Della Preghiera"*** *("On Prayer"), treat prayer in general — its nature, its necessity, the requirement that it be offered in Christ's name, the invocation of the saints, and the veneration of relics and images. Articles XVIII–XXXIII, headed* ***"Della Preghiera Pubblica"*** *("On Public Prayer"), turn to the Church's communal prayer and its practical reform (Breviary, Missal, processions, feast days, oratories, parish boundaries).*

On Prayer in General (Articles I-XVII)

I. The necessary dependence in which the intelligent creature always stands with respect to its Creator, its supreme Lord, its sole principle and last end, requires that man, whatever his state, humble himself before the majesty of his God, meditate with profound adoration on His greatness and the marvelous works of His wisdom and power, bless Him, invoke Him, thank Him, and rise up to Him, uniting himself to Him through frequent acts of love. This raising of the soul to God, this movement of the spirit toward the supreme Being, this homage rendered to the majesty of one's Creator, can be called, in a general sense, Prayer.

II. But if one considers further that God is the author of all things, that every excellent grace and every perfect gift comes from above and descends from the Father of lights, that whatever is good, holy, and perfect in nature, in grace, and in glory depends on Him and is a participation in His goodness, one easily understands that man is, moreover, in continual need of recourse to God, of addressing fervent and humble supplications to Him, in order to obtain from His mercy the goods that we firmly believe through faith, await through hope, and desire and love through charity. This humble petition — which must never be separated from movements of love, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving — is, properly speaking, what is called Prayer.

III. Although prayer, taken in this sense, was necessary to man even in the state of innocence, it became still more indispensable after his fall. Sin has reduced him to a proud poverty and an indolent indigence. He has nothing good of himself, and has a right to nothing. God, who owes man nothing, alone can fill this dreadful void by His own generosity. To this must be added that Jesus Christ, in various places in His Gospel, gave us an explicit command to pray, and gave us the most shining examples of it, spending nights in prayer and redoubling His

prayers to the Father in His agony. From all this follows the necessity of prayer for all men and at all times. The Savior Himself, who impressed on us the obligation and gave us the example of prayer, also prescribed for us its form in that prayer called the Lord's Prayer, precisely because Jesus Christ our Lord taught it to us. In it we find, admirably condensed, everything that constitutes the object of our desires and of our duties. It is the most perfect model of the prayers we can address to God.

IV. That spirit of prayer, however, which asks God for true goods and is received by Him as a pleasing fragrance, neither comes from us nor can come from us. If it is true that *we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as if from ourselves*, how could we, of ourselves, ever lift up our hearts to God with holy desires? It is the Spirit of God, then, who alone comes to the aid of our weakness. Certainly, if He does not disclose to us the abyss of our miseries, the saving hand that can lift us up, and the goods prepared and offered by divine mercy; if He does not inspire in us the desire for these things and the confidence to ask for them of the heavenly Father; and finally, if He Himself does not form in us that ineffable groaning of the heart which God hears favorably — then either we shall never pray, or we shall not pray as we ought, and we shall not even know what we ought to ask for in prayer. This spirit and grace of prayer, which is not in our own power — for otherwise it would no longer be grace — must keep us constantly in that deep humility without which our prayer would be nothing but proud presumption and a fresh sin.

V. The Spirit of God, who groans and desires within us, asks, says St. Paul, only for what is according to God. The principal object of true prayer, then, is the fulfillment of the divine designs upon the elect, together with the destruction of sin and perseverance in charity. Now the fulfillment of God's designs upon His elect consists in the possession of the heavenly Kingdom; righteousness, or charity, is the means that leads there. Hence Jesus Christ says: seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness. All other things may not be asked for except in relation to God and His Kingdom — that is, insofar as they can be means of arriving at the blessed possession of Him.

VI. From these principles it follows that the first disposition necessary for praying as one ought is a perfect detachment from created things, and a kind of weariness with every earthly consolation, leading us to aspire ardently to the true joy that God promises us in the land of peace, and to groan and sigh at finding ourselves far from it. We therefore declare:

1. that the prayer of the wicked, of lovers of the world, of all those who live willingly in sin without thinking of returning to God, is not true prayer but a lie and an execrable hypocrisy;

2. that the prayer not only of the truly righteous but also of the truly penitent and converted is pleasing to God, because it is accompanied by groanings more or less deep, according to the degree of righteousness in the former and the fervor of penitence in the latter;

3. that even sinners who, though not yet converted, nonetheless begin to feel the weight of their sins and to desire righteousness — even weakly and imperfectly — do pray truly and profitably.

VII. This first disposition, which we have just indicated, encloses and carries with it many others: sincerity, which makes us pray from the bottom of the heart with a true desire to be heard; humility and compunction, which make us pray with a contrite heart, penetrated by our own misery and weakness, and humbled under the weight of its ills; trust, which leads us to pray to God with faith and with firm confidence that He can and will hear us and deal mercifully with us; perseverance, which does not permit us ever to neglect or grow weary of praying, in view of our need, of God's mercy, and of Jesus Christ's express command; and finally attentiveness, by which the mind is kept fixed both on Him who is prayed to and on what is asked of Him, without being distracted by various voluntary distractions, whether in themselves, in their origin, or in their cause.

VIII. But the most essential of all the conditions of prayer is that it be made in the name of Jesus Christ. Since the separation that sin placed between God and man, we can no longer of ourselves have access to the Throne of the divine Majesty; we no longer have in ourselves, or by ourselves, any ground capable of moving God to hear us — indeed we deserve nothing but to be rejected by Him, since whatever we offer Him as coming merely from ourselves is unworthy of Him, being infected by cupidity. No other means, therefore, remains for us to approach God than His Only-begotten Son, who has become our propitiation, our High Priest, our Mediator. Just as God loves us only in this one object of His good pleasure, so He hears us only through Him. We declare, therefore, that it is an absolute necessity for us to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, so that any prayer not made through Jesus Christ not only fails to obtain the forgiveness of sins, but itself becomes a sin.

IX. Now, to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, properly speaking, is nothing other than to rely solely on His charity and His merits, to recognize in ourselves the Spirit who groans and prays within us, to ask for everything according to His will and with a view to the goods He has merited for us, and finally to unite ourselves to the prayer and the sacrifice of this our one Mediator.

X. Jesus Christ, moreover, not only prays for us as Priest and prays in us as Head, but is also prayed to by us as God. For, being together with the Father and the Holy Spirit true God and the Author of every grace, He must also, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be the sole object of our prayers, as He is of our adoration. And just as it would be an error, now anathematized by the Church, to adore in Jesus Christ His humanity, His flesh, or some part of it, separately from His Divinity, or by a sophistic distinction, so it would equally be an error to direct our prayers to that humanity with such a division or abstraction. We therefore, fully subscribing to our Bishop's Pastoral Letter of 3 June 1781 concerning the new Devotion to the Heart of Jesus, reject this and other similar devotions as novel and erroneous, or at least as dangerous; and, wishing them to be entirely abolished in our Churches, it shall be the Pastors' duty to exhort the Faithful to adore, invoke, and pray to Jesus Christ without division, principally in His Mysteries, as the Church has always practiced.

XI. The Mystery of the Passion of Jesus Christ must certainly, in a special way, engage our piety and our continual meditations. It would, however, be desirable — and we urge this with all the outpouring of our heart — that this same piety and meditation be freed from all the useless and dangerous material accretions to which the superstitious devout of ages near our own wished to subject it, and from which it would be too difficult to render it entirely free. The spirit of compunction and fervor certainly cannot be tied to a fixed number of stations, or to arbitrary reflections, often false, more often merely fanciful, and always full of pitfalls.

XII. At the same time that we recommend a true and solid devotion toward Jesus Christ, and declare the necessity of His mediation, we do not intend to exclude the invocation of the Saints. All the members of the Church in general are united to one another by the bonds of charity, which establishes among them a holy exchange, whose end is the glory of God and the salvation of the Elect. As a consequence of this union, the Saints who now reign with Jesus Christ, secure in their immortality, have a desire for, and an interest in, our salvation. This is what leads us to implore the intercession of the Saints, so that they may help us obtain from God, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, our Savior and theirs, the graces we need to arrive at the glorious eternity which they already enjoy.

XIII. Although, then, we hold it certain that the mediation of Jesus Christ alone is necessary, simply and absolutely, and that the invocation of the Saints does not enter essentially into the plan of the Redemption and salvation of mankind, we nevertheless confess, with the holy Council of Trent, that such invocation is good and useful. We also commend special devotion to the Blessed Virgin. She was chosen by God to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, and this election of love has filled her with graces above all the other Saints. She is also the common Mother of Christians, since, as St. Augustine says, *she cooperated by charity so that the faithful might be born in the Church, who are the members of that Head*. This special devotion toward the Blessed Virgin, however, equally with that rendered to the other Saints, must be regulated according to the spirit of the Church, which knows how to set the proper distance between Creatures and God, the sole source of life and salvation. To overstep these bounds, and to give to creatures — however holy — a worship due to God alone, far from earning us their assistance, would make us guilty of a most grave offense. The holy Synod further wishes that the honor we intend to give the Saints should lead us, with greater commitment, to their imitation, rather than to a barren and empty admiration.

XIV. As for the outward practices of devotion toward the Blessed Virgin and the other Saints, we wish every shadow of superstition to be removed — such as fixing a certain efficacy on a determined number of prayers and salutations, the sense of which is for the most part either unnoticed or not even understood, and generally on any other outward and material act or object. It will therefore be the duty of parish priests to watch over the particular devotions of their people, too often inclined to superstition. By this we intend to conform ourselves to the vigilance our Bishop has shown on this matter, especially in his Letter of 6 December 1784.

XV. Pastors of souls must show no less care in impressing upon the Faithful the true spirit of the veneration due to the Relics and Images of the Saints. According to most ancient custom, and the spirit of the universal Church, the Relics of the Saints are to be regarded as the remains of bodies created by God to be instruments of His glory, which were, together with the soul, the living temple of the Holy Spirit and members of Jesus Christ. The sight of these sacred remains, which are one day to be reanimated and clothed with eternal glory, ought to awaken in us faith in the future resurrection, and remind us of what we must do to await it with joy. Finally, the miracles which God is pleased to work in the presence of these sacred Relics invite us to turn with confidence to the intercession of those blessed souls honored in these precious remains. Far, however, from believing that there is any power in the relics themselves, the Faithful should be reminded that all our hope must rest on the power and goodness of Him who honors His faithful servants as He pleases, and who grants our petitions in the way He judges most fitting for His glory.

XVI. The sacred Images are to be honored and venerated in the same spirit. It must not be believed that there is in them any divinity or power on account of which they should be honored in a special way, or on which we should fix our trust in imitation of the Pagans, who placed their confidence in idols. But in honoring the Images we must understand ourselves to be referring this honor to their originals — that is, to be adoring Jesus Christ Himself, and in His Saints. Hence it is that, according to the Tradition of the Fathers, the whole usefulness of Images consists, first of all, in their being like a book for the unlettered, in which is set before them what they cannot learn by reading. They also serve, generally, to remind us all the more vividly of what Jesus Christ has done for us, the wonders God has worked in His Saints, and the examples He has given us in them, so that we may give thanks and be moved to imitate them.

XVII. Such are the principles on which the holy Synod desires the people to be instructed, so that their devotion and their prayers may be well regulated. Everything which, far from leading to the most holy ends the Church had in view in setting Images before us, served rather to lead us away from them, is to be truly removed as a most dangerous stumbling-block: 1. Let there be entirely removed from the Churches all Images that either present false doctrines — such as those of the carnal Heart of Jesus — or give the unlearned occasion for error, such as those of the incomprehensible Trinity, or which, instead of being edifying, are an occasion of scandal, such as lewd and ridiculous paintings breathing an air of vanity and pomp. 2. Likewise let those Images be removed in which the people seem to place a singular trust, or in which they recognize some special power contrary to the Decrees and intention of the Church — which may be inferred from special worship being rendered to one particular Image, people resorting to it more than to another, as though God and the Saints heard in a special way the prayers made before it, or as though God had attached to its veneration the promise of granting His graces. 3. To this same end the holy Synod wills that the pernicious custom of distinguishing certain given Images, especially of the Virgin, by particular titles and names — for the most part vain and childish — be entirely done away with. It shall never be

lawful to give them any designations other than those corresponding to the Mysteries expressly mentioned in Sacred Scripture. To act otherwise would be to multiply stumbling-blocks for a people accustomed to trust superstitiously in pompous names, or names suited to their particular interests. 4. Let the abuse of keeping certain particular Images covered likewise be uprooted, for besides giving the People occasion to suppose some special power in them, and so to pay them a particular cult, it also destroys the whole usefulness and purpose of Images. 5. Finally, the holy Synod wills that only Images representing the Mysteries of the Redeemer, according to the custom and forms prescribed by our Fathers, be kept in the Churches; and that, besides this, Images of the Blessed Virgin and of the other Saints not be duplicated in the Churches as far as possible, but that it be permitted instead to place, as ornament, paintings representing some edifying event from the history of the Old or New Testament.

On Public Prayer (Articles XVIII-XXXIII)

XVIII. Everyone knows that the Christian's life must be a continual prayer, according to the teaching of Jesus Christ — that is, as St. Augustine explains, it must be continually occupied with a living desire and an eager search for eternal happiness. Now, since amid life's outward occupations and its many distractions this desire can very easily grow cold in our hearts, we must, in the words of that same Father, have certain hours, certain times, certain outward means appointed to recall our spirit from the care of earthly things to the love of heavenly ones, to stir it to desire the eternal goods and to ask for them ever more fervently. For this reason the Church, intent on the spiritual good of her children, has always been accustomed to distribute at fixed hours or times the prayers she offers through her ministers and through the faithful lawfully assembled under them; and this is what is called public prayer.

XIX. All have a right to this in particular. No one can be excluded from it, just as no one can be excluded from charity, which is the soul of every prayer. Enemies are included in it, as are heretics and unbelievers. And since those whom God has appointed to govern men, both in the spiritual order and the civil order, have a special claim to it, we declare, following the teaching of St. Paul and the constant practice of the Church, that it is a duty of religion and an act of justice to offer God special prayers for the Pastors of both the first and second order, for Sovereigns and their Royal Families, and for their Ministers and Magistrates. Founded, therefore, on this incontestable truth, and adhering to our Bishop's Pastoral Letter on the duties of subjects toward the Sovereign, we will that all Priests never fail to make mention of the Prince in the Sacrifice of the Mass, adding to the Canon, after the words *Pro Antistite nostro* etc., these further words, *et pro Magno Duce nostro* etc.; and likewise that in the other public prayers the orations for the Bishop and the Sovereign not be omitted, in keeping with the orders already established. It will then be the Pastors' duty to instruct the people, with zeal and care, in the obligation they are under to join in these sentiments.

XX. Likewise, by virtue of this intimate bond of charity which establishes a holy fellowship among all the members of the Church militant and the Church suffering, we acknowledge it a holy and salutary thought to pray for those who, having died in grace, must still suffer certain pains for the expiation of their sins and are held in Purgatory until divine justice is satisfied. The holy Synod therefore wills that on the first Sunday of each month every parish priest, together with his Curates and other Priests attached to the service of his Church, the brethren of the Company of Charity, and the rest of the faithful, gather in the church of their respective Parish to pray to God for the Dead, singing or reading Vespers, the first Nocturn, and the Lauds of the Office of the Dead; and that on the following morning the Mass of Requiem be celebrated by the same, according to the rubrics prescribed in the Calendar. And since various most pernicious errors are creeping among the people on this point — for instance, that there are abandoned souls in Purgatory for whom no one prays and who are therefore left without relief, or that the private prayers of the faithful benefit only the particular souls for whom they are offered — the holy Synod exhorts the Pastors to make every effort to instruct their people prudently on this matter, showing them that such notions are entirely contrary to the Doctrine of the Church, according to which spiritual goods are held in common among the living members of Jesus Christ through the charity that unites them; so that none of them is excluded from the prayers offered in Church, since charity relates these prayers to the good and benefit of the whole body. Hence the private prayers offered by the faithful for the souls in Purgatory benefit those souls in particular, in proportion to the charity and the merit they themselves acquired in this life, by which they became more capable of sharing in it in the next. The holy Synod likewise intends to forbid, on this point, all practices not authorized by the Church, or that might instill some superstition in the people.

XXI. Nor can parish priests ever sufficiently commend the usefulness of public prayer, since Jesus Christ promised in His Gospel that if two or three should gather together in His name, He would be in their midst, and all would be granted to their petitions. This union of prayers, offered in one and the same spirit of faith, hope, and charity, forms — according to the thought of Tertullian, already noted above — that holy violence which God welcomes and receives with favor.

XXII. From this arises the obligation of every Christian to take part in public prayer, to enter into the spirit and understanding of the Church's orations and ceremonies, of the divine Offices, and above all of the holy Sacrifice of the Mass; from this likewise arises, for the Pastors, the duty to watch over the carrying out of matters of such importance.

XXIII. Above all, however, we judge it our duty to cooperate with our Prelate in the reform of the Breviary and Missal of our Church, by altering, correcting, and putting the divine Offices into better order. Everyone knows that God, who is Truth itself, does not wish to be honored with falsehoods; and that, moreover, the most learned and holy men — and the Popes themselves — have in recent times recognized many falsehoods in our Breviary, especially as regards the readings on the Saints, and have admitted the need for a more accurate reform. As for the other parts of the Breviary, everyone understands that many things of little use or

edification would need to be replaced by others drawn from the word of God or from the genuine works of the Fathers; but above all, the Breviary itself ought to be arranged so that, over the course of a year, the whole of Holy Scripture would be read in it. Meanwhile, the holy Council adopts the sample of corrections sent by the Bishop to the Priests with his Pastoral Letter of the 1st of January of this year, and leaves it to the Bishop himself to appoint some of our brethren to complete this holy work.

XXIV. Since, moreover, we know that it would be acting against apostolic practice, and against the designs of God, not to provide the ordinary people with the easiest means of joining their voice to that of the whole Church, we think it right to leave to the Bishop the task of choosing some of the venerable Fathers to undertake the compiling of a Ritual and a Manual for the use of the City and Diocese of Pistoia, in which — besides the necessary instructions and explanations — there should be found, in Latin and in the vernacular, the Church's ritual prayers for the administration of the Sacraments, the Offices of the principal feasts of the year, the Ordinary of the Mass, and everything else that can most readily lead to the instruction and edification of the people. Care will also be taken to include in this Manual Psalms and Hymns rendered into Italian verse, so that these may, as far as possible, take the place of profane songs, and so that the same consolation may be had which St. Jerome felt on hearing the laboring peasants of Bethlehem accompany their toil with the singing of Psalms.

XXV. To the same end of engaging the faithful ever more deeply in the true spirit of prayer, we think it right to turn our attention to establishing a useful regulation for certain other sacred observances. We have seen, from sad experience, that the so-called Novenas, Octaves, etc., the multiplication of Processions, and certain new extraordinary feasts, far from calling the People back to solid piety, serve rather to dissipate them and draw them away from the more respectable practices of Religion, and most often open the door to a multiplicity of scandals and disorders. In view of this, the holy Synod wills that, henceforth, no Novena may be held without the Bishop's permission. As for the preparation for the solemnity of holy Christmas, in the countryside this shall be carried out uniformly according to the plan and rules prescribed by our Bishop in his Letter of 26 November 1785. Further, in order to remedy the many disorders that used to occur during the night service of holy Christmas, following the example of other respectable Dioceses, we order that, both in the City and in the countryside, all the observances customarily held on that holy night be moved to the morning, after sunrise. As for feast days, apart from that of the Titular Saint of each Church and the others established by ancient ecclesiastical custom, no other extraordinary feasts shall ever be introduced. Finally, Processions shall be limited to the following only. Inside the church, there shall be only the Procession of Palm Sunday, that of the Holy Sepulchre, and that of the Purification. Outside the church, there shall be held only the Processions for the Solemnity of the Body of the Lord, and those of the Rogations, or greater and lesser Litanies — for which, in the City, the arrangement fixed by the Bishop in his Letter of 2 April of this year shall be followed entirely, and in the countryside a brief procession shall be made in each church within the bounds of its own Parish. All other Processions — especially those meant to carry

some Image or Relic about, and still more those directed to visiting some Image of the Blessed Virgin or of another Saint, which tend to end in banquets and in unseemly, disorderly gatherings — are absolutely abolished.

XXVI. With such measures, we may hope that the People, no longer distracted by so many observances more often suited to strike the senses than to nurture a true spirit of Christian piety, will more readily be led back to a more exact observance of their duties, and above all to the true sanctification of feast days — an object hitherto too much neglected. The Pastors shall therefore teach their people that, although according to the doctrine of the Fathers the life of a true Christian ought to be one continual feast — since, considering himself as always living in God, he ought unceasingly to sing or meditate His praises — nevertheless, since very few Christians are so perfect as to keep this continual spiritual Sabbath, it has pleased the Church to add to Sunday, which holds the place of the Jewish Sabbath, certain other particular feasts, so that those who lack sufficient fervor to occupy their spirit and heart continually with the Mysteries of Jesus Christ and the greatness of His Saints may, from time to time, away from business and earthly cares, recall their minds to such things, redouble the fervor of their prayer, attend to instruction, assist at the Sacrifice, sing God's praises, and practice with greater fervor the other duties of Christian piety.

XXVII. That which, however, was in its origin a remedy for human weakness, became over time, through abuse, an occasion of stumbling. The excessive multiplication of feast days has produced an equal indifference toward all festive days, the Lord's own not excepted; and what serves the rich as an opportunity for idleness, vanity, and excess is equally harmful to the poor, since on those days they cannot attend to their labor, and languish in want and misery. The paternal care of those who govern us in God's name has long sought to remedy this, by reducing many of these feast days to the sole obligation of hearing Mass — what was called a feast of not entire precept. But grievous experience shows that this measure did not suffice to remedy the abuses. The holy Synod, therefore, following the example of other Councils, of many most holy Bishops, and of certain Roman Pontiffs, desires that, while leaving in full force the most ancient solemnities common to the whole Church, the feasts of not entire precept be abolished altogether, and the others reduced to a more modest and limited number, in the hope of thereby removing the pretext for the dissipation of the more lukewarm faithful. To this end the holy Synod wishes that a petition be humbly presented to His Royal Highness; and in the meantime it will be the duty of parish priests to bring the people entrusted to them to share these same sentiments, and to encourage them to sanctify, with a true spirit of Christian piety, the Sundays and such other feasts as it may seem fitting to relax.

XXVIII. On this occasion they shall remind the people that the most legitimate means of sanctifying feast days is to attend and take part, as is fitting, in the sacred functions to be held in their respective Parishes. On this point, renewing the ancient Canons, we declare this to be, for all the faithful, an express duty, from which nothing but the reason of true necessity or of charity can excuse them. "Let all things be done," says St. Paul, "decently and in order." Now the good order that ought to be observed in all things, and especially in acts of religion,

requires that, since Parishes are like a family living under its Head and Father — who is the Parish priest — all Parishioners should join together like brothers under him, to pray, to offer the Sacrifice, and to receive from this common father the spiritual food at one and the same table. These are the sentiments our Prelate expressed in his Pastoral Letter of 6 January 1784, on the occasion of the establishment of the new Parishes of Prato — sentiments we embrace as being entirely in keeping with ancient practice and with the spirit of the Church.

XXIX. It cannot be denied that uniformity of method, both in the instructions and in the prayers held in the respective Parishes, is a most effective means of achieving what we have urged up to this point. To this end, besides the Catechism of Gourlin already proposed and adopted, and besides the short Catechism of Monsignor Montazet, we deem it opportune to propose to the Parish priests the Moral Reflections on the New Testament, and the Compendium of the History and Morality of the Old Testament, enriched with wise and useful reflections by the pious and learned Monsieur Mésenguy — already sent by our Prelate to all the Parish priests with his Letter of 15 February 1785. These works may be read after all the other church services, as is seen practiced with great edification in some Parishes. The sound maxims of Religion, and the unction with which these golden books are filled, will be reason enough for wise Pastors not to be lightly induced to set them aside in favor of others perhaps less useful and edifying.

XXX. Since, moreover, the union of the faithful in a holy league, joined together to offer prayers to the Lord and to stir one another mutually to works of Christian charity toward their neighbor, in that spirit of holy love proper to the children of the new covenant, has always been commended in the Church of God, the holy Synod recognizes as most useful for this purpose the Company of Charity already established in our Diocese, and wills that all its Constitutions be religiously observed, especially the eighth and ninth Chapters, concerning almsgiving for the Poor. On this we urge that the Circular of His Royal Highness, sent by our Prelate to the parish priests with his Letter of 28 May 1786, be punctually carried out.

XXXI. Furthermore, so that the People may not be hindered from attending the public offices of the Parish Church, the holy Synod, following the further pious wishes of our religious Sovereign, wills that all public Oratories in the City be done away with entirely, since those of the countryside have already been dealt with in the Decree on the Eucharist. As for domestic and private Oratories, it wills that it not be permitted in the City to celebrate Mass in them on Sundays and other feast days, leaving it to the Bishop's discreet judgment to decide, for the rest, whatever shall seem most fitting.

XXXII. Until otherwise determined with regard to the Regular clergy, the holy Synod approves the wise measures already taken by our most zealous Pastor in his Letters to his Vicar General of 16 March 1785 and 8 April of the same year, which prescribe that the Regulars, on Sundays and other feasts of obligation, as well as during Holy Week, refrain from keeping their own church open and instead betake themselves to the divine offices and sacred

functions held in the respective Parishes, serving the People as true and worthy assistants to the parish priests.

XXXIII. Finally, the holy Synod, wishing to provide for the convenience of the People, who must attend the public prayer of the Parish Church, and considering the irregularity and the difficult division and boundaries of many Parishes, is of the opinion that a humble petition be presented to the Sovereign, so that he may deign to arrange and establish new boundaries for them, having regard to the temporal advantages that the People derive from one parish rather than another.

Decree on the Life and Honesty of Clerics — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

VIII Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session VI, pages 212–214, immediately following the Decree on Prayer and preceding the Decree on Ecclesiastical Conferences. A short decree: it renews ancient conciliar bans on clergy attending public entertainments, warns against overly familiar contact with women, and — its most distinctive feature — makes it a matter of synodal law that every cleric personally own and read the whole Bible daily, alongside the diocesan Catechism, closing with an endorsement of the Grand Duke's new Ecclesiastical Academy for training priests.*

I. Although, after the wise measures taken by the holy Council to ensure the qualities and vocation of sacred Ministers, we have every ground to hope in the Lord that all will conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the holiness of their calling, we cannot nevertheless excuse ourselves from adding something concerning the life and honesty of Clerics, mindful of the divine teaching that as the Priest is, so too will be the people entrusted to his care.

II. Adhering, then, on this point, to the ancient decrees of the holy Councils of Laodicea, of Carthage IV, and of Trent, we forbid all those who, through clerical tonsure, are enrolled in the inheritance and lot of the Lord — and still more all Cooperator Priests and Parish priests of the Diocese — to attend, for any reason whatsoever, any kind of public spectacle, dance, game, or private gaming-house, where, to the gravest harm of innocence, bad conduct, gluttony, and intemperance triumph, and the maxims of the Gospel are recklessly trampled underfoot. For what fellowship can there be between light and darkness, what communion between Belial and the God of the living? Let the Ministers of the Sanctuary well remember that they are the light of the world, to dispel the darkness of error; they are the image of the living God, destined to recall it upon the children of men.

III. We further exhort each and every one of the sacred Ministers, so far as is compatible with the duties of his own ministry, to avoid all overly familiar conversation and needless association with women, whoever they may be, whether of his own Parish or of another's — whether by visiting them in their own homes, or lingering with them in Church, or spending excessive time with them at the tribunal of Penance — knowing well that the Minister of God must abstain not only from every stain of sin, but also from every shadow and suspicion of wrongdoing.

IV. But above all else it is necessary that the Pastor of souls be fully clothed with the spirit of Jesus Christ, so as to be able to instill and form it in the hearts of his faithful, and, by his own example, to build up in them every kind of Christian virtue — humility, chastity, gentleness,

charity, disinterestedness, contempt for earthly things, and however many other virtues the Apostle expresses in his letters to Titus and Timothy. To this end, the holy Synod wills that, besides the Diocesan Catechism, each Priest have and keep by him the volume of the sacred Scriptures containing the Old and New Testament, so as to make the word of God his chaste delight and the principal subject of his daily meditations. On this book of life were formed all the Saints who preceded us, in knowledge and in piety. And if this book has, by divine mercy, been given to all men to serve as a guide and a sure escort in their steps, it has been entrusted, in a particular way, to the keeping of Priests, so that, filling themselves with it, they may share it with the people by explaining to them its holy and most salutary Mysteries. Whenever such food proves sweet and delightful to their palate, this will be the surest testimony of the heavenly blessings the eternal Father is preparing for both Pastor and people. Conversely, distaste and weariness with it will be the mark of a heart still possessed and encumbered by earthly attachments, and a matter of grave concern for both.

V. In the exercise of the duties proper to his ecclesiastical ministry, however, the Parish priest shall not forget that he is nevertheless a citizen, and a member of civil society all the more concerned for its good, the more his character earns him the greater esteem and trust of the people. His care must therefore not be confined to preaching the word of God and to the bare administration of the Sacraments, but he must, on every occasion, attend to their needs, help them with his counsel, take an interest in their afflictions, mediate family disputes, take care of the widow and the orphan — in a word, console, guide, and assist them in every respect, both spiritually and materially. In vain would he bear the tender name of father, if he did not likewise show in himself its qualities, and bear its obligations.

VI. With these weapons our Fathers already triumphed over the fierceness of the Nations, and thus opened the way for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. With this same end in view — of giving the Church excellent Priests and excellent Citizens — the piety and munificence of our enlightened Sovereign has been pleased, besides the Seminary for younger Clerics, also to open the Ecclesiastical Academy for Adults, so that they may not undertake the governance of souls before having been trained in the most solid social and Christian virtues.

VII. The holy Synod, therefore, full of holy joy, makes it its duty to applaud so praiseworthy an establishment, and, adhering to the intentions of the Council of Trent, exhorts, from the depths of the heart of Jesus Christ, that all Clerics of this Diocese not undertake the ecclesiastical career unless they have first tested their vocation in the aforesaid Seminary, and then, having passed into the Royal Academy of St. Leopold, been perfected in that solidity of doctrine and of exercises of piety, of which we already rejoice to gather such fine fruits.

VIII. Indeed, we make it our express duty to adhere to the intentions of His Royal Highness, made known to us in Article 18 of the points transmitted to our most zealous Pastor, and to beg him to extend, with an increase in funding, the number of free places in this same Ecclesiastical Academy, so that, in view of so many advantages, the path may not be barred,

for want of means, to those who unite to a true vocation the talent and character needed to make themselves useful to the Church.

Decree and Method for Ecclesiastical Conferences — Synod of Pistoia (1786)

XIII Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), Session VI, pages 215–220, immediately following the Decree on the Life and Honesty of Clerics and preceding the Petition and Memoranda that close the session. This decree institutes monthly clergy conferences on moral and dogmatic theology, organized around an eight-year rotating curriculum meant to work systematically through the whole of theology, and sets out detailed procedural rules for how the conferences are to be run, recorded, and reported back to the Bishop.*

I. The institution of Ecclesiastical Conferences is grounded in the very nature of the Church's government, which is a government of unity and shared counsel. In the earliest times these were the ordinary setting in which the business of the Diocese was examined, discipline regulated, abuses reformed, the needs of the People provided for, and judgments on offenders formed. The increase of the faithful made it necessary to divide Dioceses into Parishes, and the continuation of this custom accordingly became too impractical. Deaneries therefore began to be established, and it was determined that the Priests of each should gather together at fixed times to examine the state of the Parishes and deliberate on their good governance. The purpose of these assemblies was to preserve unity of governance within the Clergy, and to keep intact, in the Parishes, the deposit of faith and the rigor of discipline. This order was preserved in the Church down to the age of those centuries in which, through the decline of learning, ignorance was introduced into the Clergy, along with the corruption of morals that accompanies ignorance.

In later times, disorder increased through the new doctrines that were introduced. Scholasticism opened the way to the invention of new and mutually conflicting systems on the most precious truths, and finally led to probabilism and laxism; and the change in the form of Ecclesiastical government caused the ministers of the Church to forget their rights, which are at the same time their obligations, and ended by losing the primitive notion of the ecclesiastical ministry and of pastoral solicitude. From this it followed that the assemblies of Pastors were reduced either to an outward formality, or to arid discussions of abstract questions and scholastic distinctions, amounting to a mere materialism of words, or to the resolution of speculative cases, in which, after a debate grounded on empty subtleties, or on the authority of the Casuists, or, at best, on the force of some Pontiff's ruling on a given proposition, a decision was pronounced — which was, at times, itself problematic. At a time when the Lord, mindful of the promises made to the Church, comes to visit this vineyard of His, we would be at fault were we to pass over so important a matter in silence. It is fitting

that we apply ourselves to reforming this institution, recalling it to its original purpose; and to this end we judge it expedient to determine what follows.

II. The Bishop, either personally or through his Theologian, shall propose, at the beginning of each year, the subjects to be treated in the course of that year, and shall propose them in such an order that the whole body of Theology comes, little by little, to be worked through, to be completed over the span of eight years.

The examination shall begin with the foundations of the Christian Religion, and with how these alone are the sure sources of the rule of our faith, as well as of our morals. Scripture, Tradition, and the authority of the Church in proposing doctrine — of which she is the custodian and infallible judge — shall be treated, and the means for discerning the Church's voice amid truths obscured or contested shall be pointed out; discussion will then turn to the two vicarious powers of God in the direction of mankind, their rights will be set forth, along with the obligation of those subject to them to obey, and this subject will be concluded with a treatise on human laws.

These principles having been laid down, the nature of the submission of faith that Christians owe to divine truths shall be set forth, along with the manner of conforming one's conduct of life to the true rule of morals; and here human acts, and their goodness or malice, will be discussed.

Discussion will then move to God and His attributes, the Trinity, the creation of man, his fall, the necessity of a Redeemer, the mystery of redemption, and the grace of this Redeemer, concluding with an exposition of the nature of the virtue of hope, which Christians must place in God through the merits of this same Redeemer.

Discussion will then descend to the character of the covenant made between God and man through Jesus Christ, and the nature of His Law. The character of the virtue of charity, which is the fullness of this Law, shall be set forth; the duties this charity prescribes toward God and toward one's Neighbor shall be explained, and the spirit and scope of the precepts of the Decalogue shall be derived from these principles. Finally, the Sacraments and Prayer shall be treated.

III. This is the order of subjects. The Theologian shall accordingly propose, within each of them, the points and questions to be examined, ensuring that the questions proposed are such as to reach the very substance of those subjects, and to encompass them in their full extent. He shall propose them, moreover, in such a way that the clarification of the speculative maxim is always joined to an exposition of the proper practical guidance to be drawn from it, and, further, so that any abuses that may have crept into this practice are brought to light, along with the most prudent and reliable way of reforming them.

IV. The resolution of these points shall be the principal business of the conferences, and shall proceed in this order. In each article, what belongs to faith and to the essence of Religion shall be distinguished from what is a matter of discipline. The nature of this discipline shall then be

examined — its purpose and its character — and what is necessary or useful for keeping the Faithful in the right spirit shall be distinguished from what is useless and tends to burden the Faithful with a weight ill-suited to the freedom of the children of the new Covenant; and still more from what is dangerous or harmful, because it leads to superstition and materialism. Finally, it shall be examined whether any opinion contrary to known dogmas, or any disciplinary practice less consistent with the settled principles, exists in the Parishes, and the most suitable means of reform shall be devised.

V. Resolutions shall be drawn from the pure sources of Scripture, the Councils, the Fathers, and the discipline of venerable antiquity. As for the use of modern Authors, those shall be chosen who profess to remain attached to the aforesaid sources; and to this end, each Conference shall discuss the Authors who treat most precisely the subject proposed to it.

These resolutions shall, moreover, be brief, clear, and decisive; there shall be no descending into useless subtleties or scholastic distinctions, but a solid entry into the nature of things, and into their relations to one another.

VI. Someone chosen by lot at the preceding Conference shall bring the resolution in writing, and, after it has been read, each of the others shall state his views on the resolution read. Should there be a difference of views, the disputed point shall be examined seriously and with the sole aim of finding the truth, setting aside all animosity and every spirit of faction. And should unanimity and certainty still not be reached, the President shall report this to the Bishop, who, either personally or through his Theologian, shall issue the decision.

VII. The decision, once put in writing, shall be handed to the Secretary, who shall then draw up a brief but complete analysis of it, entirely in the vernacular tongue, adding to it whatever was said on the matter by the members of the Conference, as well as whatever was there objected to, and indicating, in each article, the names of the authors cited.

At the following Conference, the Secretary shall read this analysis aloud, and, once it has been approved, the President shall sign it in the name of all.

VIII. This examination of the respective subjects shall be the business of the Conferences, and, since letting discussion wander into various tangents is usually the reason such subjects are not examined thoroughly and in their full extent, this abuse shall accordingly be prevented.

IX. Only at the end of the Conference shall those who have some important matter to propose for the common good, or for maintaining union and uniformity, as well as those who have encountered particular cases in the conduct of their Parishes on which they need advice, bring them forward, and the members shall give their views briefly and clearly.

It shall then be the President's responsibility to keep a record of the matters proposed and of the decisions reached, so as to inform the Bishop of them in due course. And should the matter be important, or should the Conference have been unable to reach a decisive and certain resolution, he shall promptly give the Bishop notice of it.

X. The conferences shall be held in a fitting place established by the Bishop. They shall take place once a month, August, September, and October excepted; the number of Parish priests required to attend shall likewise be fixed. Should they need to be interrupted on account of unfavorable weather, it shall be left to the President's discretion to hold them earlier, or to postpone them until the difficulty has passed, as well as to vary the months set aside as vacation.

All Priests of the district assigned to the Conferences shall attend, and those with a legitimate impediment shall promptly inform the President of it, and shall communicate to him in writing their views on the points proposed — except in the case of being prevented by illness. No Conference shall last less than two hours.

Duties of the President

XI. The President shall be chosen by the Bishop, in whose name he shall personally preside at every Conference. It shall be his office to convene the Conferences, and to see that the established method is observed in them with due order, gravity, and commitment. He shall grant each member full freedom to speak, but shall at the same time prevent all animosity and dispute, as well as superfluous and irrelevant discussion. He shall oversee the accuracy and truthfulness of the Secretary's record, which the latter must draw up of everything transacted at the Conferences. Finally, he shall inform the Bishop of how exactly the established order is being observed, as well as whether anyone has shown little regard for good order and reform, and especially whether anyone has shown opposition or obstinacy.

Duties of the Secretary

XII. The Secretary shall be chosen by the Bishop. He shall carry out the President's instructions regarding the convening of the Conferences; and, should some obstacle prevent them from being held on the day fixed at the preceding one, he shall be careful in drawing up the analysis of the matters treated at each Conference, honest in reporting the views and objections of each member, and exact in transmitting to the Bishop, every month, both the resolution read and his own analysis. He shall keep a book in which he shall note the place and day of each Conference. And should a Conference have been postponed beyond the day fixed at the previous one, he shall note the cause of the delay, those who attended, those who were absent, and the latter's excuses. He shall note, as briefly as possible, the questions proposed, who treated them in writing, and whoever else spoke on them. He shall then, with the same brevity, record any particular questions unrelated to the subjects currently under discussion, their Authors, those who answered them, and whether they were resolved by unanimous consent. Finally, he shall note the notice given for the next Conference.

Order to Be Followed in the Records of the Conferences

XIII. The Conference shall be opened by the President with an invocation of the Holy Spirit. The Secretary shall then read the analysis of the matters treated at the preceding Conference, and the President shall sign it. The treatise of whoever was to bring it in writing shall then be read, after which each member shall state his views on the treatise read and on its subject. When this is finished, whoever has something to propose shall be heard, and matters proposed shall be deliberated and decided jointly; the day for the next Conference shall then be announced. Among the points to be treated, those who are to resolve them in writing shall be chosen by lot. Finally, the President shall close with the Prayer: *O God, who gather together what has strayed and been scattered, and preserve what has been gathered: we beseech you, mercifully pour out upon the Christian people the grace of your unity, that, division being cast aside, uniting itself to the true Shepherd of your Church, it may be enabled to serve you worthily. Through our Lord* &c. — and with the customary thanksgiving.

Session VII — 28 September 1786 (closing session)

The Closing of the Synod: Session VII and the Decree on the Synodal Constitutions and Their Authority

V Articles

Source: *Atti e Decreti del Concilio Diocesano di Pistoja dell'anno MDCCLXXXVI (Florence, 1788 edition), pages 245–250. This is the seventh and final session of the Synod, and its single short decree — Delle Costituzioni Sinodali e della loro Autorità ("On the Synodal Constitutions and Their Authority") — is the last piece of legislation the Synod passed. It is framed here together with the ceremony that opened and closed the session, since together they form the actual ending of the whole Synod: a roll-call vote to proceed, a letter of thanks from Grand Duke Peter Leopold (which even references the Cellesi affair from Session VI), the decree itself, a solemn procession to the Cathedral, a sung litany, and the Bishop's final blessing and farewell to the assembled clergy.*

Opening of the Seventh Session

28 September 1786.

Monsignor the Bishop, kneeling at the faldstool in the Church of S. Leopoldo, intoned the antiphon *Hear us, O Lord*, etc., and, once the Congregation had sung the Psalm *Save me* etc., put on his sacred vestments. After the reading of the Gospel of St. Luke, *At that time: Jesus, having called together* etc., the Hymn *Veni Creator* was intoned. The Prelate then proceeded, as usual, to his place before the full Assembly, where he said the Prayer: *Grant, we beseech You, merciful God, to Your Church, that, gathered together by the Holy Spirit, she may deserve to serve You with untroubled devotion. Through our Lord* etc., who lives with You etc.; and he then addressed the Synod in these terms:

"Venerable Co-workers and fellow Priests, the Promoter of this holy Diocesan Synod will now publish, in the Lord's name, as was announced at the last session, the Decree concerning the Synodal Constitutions and their authority. May the spirit of perseverance and of Christian steadfastness be with you."

The Synod having answered, *So be it*, one of the Secretaries read the said Decree, and, the Fathers having approved it fully and unanimously, the first Notary drew up the formal record of it, and the Secretary continued from the pulpit as follows:

"Is it your pleasure, Venerable President, Fathers, and fellow Priests, to close this holy Diocesan Synod, gathered in the name of the Lord, guided by the Divine Spirit in unanimity and concord, in a spirit of wisdom, charity, and justice?"

They answered: *It is our pleasure.*

"Is it your pleasure to go in procession to the Cathedral, to thank God for the abundance of His gifts upon us?"

They answered: *It is our pleasure.*

"Is it your pleasure to testify meanwhile, with common acclamation, to the respectable Minister of His Royal Highness, to our most zealous holy Father the Bishop, to the most distinguished and enlightened Promoter, and to the learned and illustrious Theologians and Canonists who have assisted us, our deep gratitude and our thanks — and those prayers which, rising from the depths of our stirred hearts, implore for all of them the fullness of heavenly reward, and join with the most ardent wish that the seeds scattered in this holy Church of Pistoia may bear abundant fruit for our own salvation, and for that of the Souls entrusted to us?"

They answered: *It is our pleasure.*

The Grand Duke's Letter of Thanks

Monsignor the President, having received during the course of this holy Synod several Letters from the Royal Private Secretariat, and wishing to attest to His Royal Highness the most respectful veneration, and his own consolation, of the Venerable Fathers, through whose efforts, with God's help, this holy Assembly had so excellent an outcome, thought it well to communicate to the holy Synod the most recent Letter, worded as follows:

"Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Lord and Esteemed Patron.

His Royal Highness has received with the greatest pleasure Your Lordship's Letters with the further results of the Synod.

He was likewise pleased that Canon Fabrizio Cellesi has come to his senses, and has taken the path of duty.

I offer you his most sincere compliments on the excellent, peaceful, and consistent outcome of so important a matter, and he hopes it will set a good example and mark an epoch in these matters — something that could not have been achieved otherwise than through the well-known prudence and zeal of Your Illustrious and Most Reverend Lordship.

His Royal Highness has been sorry to find himself somewhat unwell these past days, since he has not been able to come there to enjoy so respectable a Gathering; but, finding himself

presently better, he will be very glad to see Your Illustrious and Most Reverend Lordship next Friday, in the manner mentioned in your Letter.

I have the honor to remain, with the most distinguished respect, Your Illustrious and Most Reverend Lordship's Most devoted and obliged servant, Falger. From the Royal Villa of Castello, 27 September 1786."

"If the clemency and condescension of so great and so religious a Sovereign oblige us all to pray to the Lord in a special way to grant him many happy years for the good of the Tuscan Church and of his most faithful Subjects, the attachment and gratitude we profess toward his sacred Person oblige us no less to give him public testimony of it. Is it your pleasure, then, Venerable Fathers, that the parish priest of S. Andrea, and the parish priest of S. Giusto in Piazzanese, be Deputies of the Synod to go, together with Monsignor the President, to thank His Royal Highness for the special protection graciously granted to the holy Council, and to humbly present to him the petitions approved at the sixth Session?"

They answered: *It is our pleasure.*

The Closing Prayer, Procession, and Mass

When this reading was finished, all the Fathers rose, and Monsignor the Bishop said the following Prayer:

Let us pray. O Lord, there is no virtue of human conscience that can undergo the judgments of Your will without offense; and therefore, since Your eyes see our imperfection, grant, merciful God, that we may bring to a close what we so greatly desire to complete according to the perfection of Your equity... Through our Lord. Amen.

After this he solemnly intoned the *Te Deum*, and then proceeded to the Cathedra, and the solemn Procession to the Cathedral began, following the same order observed at the first Session. All the bells of the City were rung then, as at the opening of the Synod, and as had been done at the beginning of each Session. When the Procession ended, with the Bishop, the Fathers, and all the Theologians and Canonists at their respective assigned places in the Cathedral, the Cantors sang the versicle *Let us bless the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit*, and the choir answered *Let us praise and exalt Him above all forever*; after which the Prelate sang several Prayers of thanksgiving.

When these Prayers were finished, Canon-Archpriest Giuseppe Sozzifanti celebrated the solemn Mass of the Most Holy Trinity, at which Monsignor the Bishop assisted Pontifically, and in which one of the Synodal provisions was put into practice, the music and the organ falling silent from the Offertory until after Communion. When the Mass ended — at which neither the *Ite Missa est* was said, nor the blessing given — Monsignor the Bishop, descending from the Cathedra with his two attendant Ministers, went to the middle of the Altar, where, seated on the faldstool, he addressed an Allocution to the Synod.

The Decree on the Synodal Constitutions and Their Authority

I. We have, up to now, done nothing more than lay the foundations of that salutary reform which has been desired for so long in our Diocese. The objects of so praiseworthy a renewal were too varied and too great for us to promise ourselves that we have perfectly provided for everything. We are, however, confident that, by following the course marked out thus far, Pastors will have light enough to attend to the sanctification of souls with that uniformity of doctrine and purity of morals absolutely necessary for the proper fulfillment of the sacred duties of their ministry. The maxims, therefore, established by unanimous consent in this holy Synod, shall be regarded by them as the compendium of the Diocese's teaching. To these they shall frequently turn their attention, and these shall serve them as a guide in deciding whatever controversies may arise in their Parishes.

II. The Synodal Constitutions have, at all times, been regarded as the legislative body of the Dioceses, and these have, for the most part, opened the way to the plenary decisions of the universal Church, or at least of National Assemblies.

III. But so that the multiplicity of these Constitutions should not generate confusion, knowing that other Synods of this Diocese are still in force, we declare that, after the publication of this one, the others shall be understood to be entirely abrogated. We are all the more willingly led to this necessary abrogation in that we have observed certain things to have crept into them which the unhappiness of the times perhaps rendered less noticeable, but which we must regard as not entirely in conformity with the pure sources of antiquity, and contrary to the sacred rights of the State.

IV. After this, nothing remains for us but, first, to lift our hearts to the Lord, the supreme Father of lights, who has deigned to inspire in us this so exemplary and unanimous cooperation, whereby, in a true spirit of peace and charity, we have come to conclude this holy Synod; and, secondly, to turn to our most zealous and enlightened Sovereign, that, following the example of the ancient holy Emperors, he may deign to grant us the protection so necessary for the exact execution of these Constitutions, and thereby further confirm his title as Father of his peoples and protector of the Canons. We have too constant a proof of this zeal of his to be able to have any greater certainty of it.

V. And so that no disorder should arise concerning the execution of the Synodal Decrees, we determine that they shall take effect only one month after their publication by the Bishop, who shall communicate a copy of them to all the parish priests.

The Closing Litany and Blessing

He then returned to the Cathedra, and, standing together with all the Fathers, the following acclamations were sung from the pulpit by two Cantors:

Cantors: *Let us all say:* Choir: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *For the highest peace and gracious governance, we beseech You.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *For our Pope Pius, and all his Clergy, we entreat You.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *For our Bishop Scipione, and the whole flock committed to him, we ask You.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *For the Fathers of this gracious Synod, that everlasting grace and a happy return to their Churches be theirs, we pray You.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *For our Most Serene Grand Duke Peter Leopold, and his Family, and all his People, we ask You.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *For this City, and all who dwell in it, that You may save them.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *For mild weather and fair skies, and for the fruitfulness of the earth, O good Giver.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *For those who are sick and afflicted with various illnesses, that You may heal them.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *For the faithful departed, and all who rest in our cemeteries, that they may rest in peace.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.* Cant.: *Hear us, O God, in all our tribulation, for You are merciful.* Cho.: *Lord, have mercy.*

After which the Bishop said several further Prayers, and, having finished, gave the solemn blessing to the People; the Deacon then, turning from the middle of the Altar toward the Fathers, said: *Let us depart in peace*, and all answered: *In the Name of Christ. Amen.*

After this, the Fathers, having removed their Stoles, came forward to Monsignor the Bishop to kiss his hand, and received from him the most meaningful expressions of holy unity and paternal affection. They tenderly returned the tears and the embraces of peace of their Prelate, and then, preceded by the Master of Ceremonies and the second Notary, returned to the Church of S. Leopoldo, where each, having put off his vestments, prepared to return to his own residence.